

THE PHARAO “WHO HAD NOT KNOWN JOSEPH”

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English translation of an article published in French under the title “Le pharaon qui n'avait pas connu Joseph”, in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers du Cercle Ernest Renan* no. 1 (July-September 2016), Paris, pp. 55-117.

In the original article, Biblical verses were *Segond 1910*'s. Here, it is the *Shem Qadosh Version 2015* which has been preferred, but some words or turns of phrase have sometimes been replaced by others which better give back the Masoretic text. In these cases, *SQV*'s text is given within square brackets.

Synopsis

State matters about a possible historicity of the Hebrews' exodus during the reign of the first pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty by the paralleling of some elements of the biblical narratives and our knowledge about the relations between Pharaonic Egypt and West Semitic world of the second millennium BCE.

INTRODUCTION

A belief deeply rooted in the memory of the Jews of the Antiquity is a stay of their ancestors in Egypt in a distant past. It already existed in Samaria in the 8th century BCE¹ but probably came from traditions circulating in Canaan long before the creation of Israel's and Judas's kingdoms².

No trace of these events has never been found in the literature of the ancient Levant. Only in Egypt there remain some archaeological evidence of a sojourn of Asiatic people in the Delta, but the few texts speaking about it were distorted by the pharaonic propaganda or by centuries of transmission³. Anyway, they never mention those whom the Bible calls “Israel” or “the children of Israel” but a group of people they consider as

¹ Am 2:10; 3:1; 9:7; Hos 11:1; 13:4.

² Finkelstein – Silberman 2002: 68-69.

³ We must of course distinguish them from those reporting the presence of *šmw* in the Delta during the First Intermediate Period (c. 2200 – c. 2050).

originating of *rtnw* (“Syria-Palestine”)⁴, a people that we call “Hyksos” from an indication of Flavius Josephus⁵.

Could the dumbness of pharaonic sources about the Hebrews be interpreted as a proof of the non-existence of their stay in Egypt?

Certainly not. We can observe the same muteness of sources *properly Levantine* regarding the sojourn of a group of Syrian-Palestinian population in the Nile Valley, while the Hyksos stranglehold on Lower and Middle Egypt for over a century was well real. The fact that the Hyksos did not have scripture may explain this silence. They adopted the Egyptian writing but their rare elites able to transcribe it would rapidly forget its use after their eviction and their spread in Canaan. The control they exercised on Egypt would then no longer have become a more or less precise memory transmitted orally. We do not know what happened to the members of the Asiatic population banished from Egypt or defeated at Sharuhén. The Hyksos disappeared suddenly from the documentation and no scripture that can be awarded to them has never been found outside the Nile Valley (except some inscribed scarab-shaped seals or amulets discovered in Nubia and Palestine, some Egyptian usurped monuments and dishware pieces carried outside Egypt at an indeterminate epoch).

The question that arises is to know if *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and allusions in other Biblical books would keep some memories of these events.

We cannot answer this question in a categorical way. The submission of the biblical sources to a non-denominational assessment reveals that the passages concerning the stay of the so-called “children of Israel” in Egypt and their exodus reflect what was said at the time of their writing. It is not possible to check the veracity of this tradition rebuilt from probable memory work and late hearsay, and in which often enter embellishments arisen from their author’s imagination. That being, do we have to consider the frame of these narratives as not issued of a half-forgotten tradition but of a thesis proposed at the end of long latency period? Or as a fiction arisen from bigots’ phantasms displayed in length of pages for the sole purpose to exalt the glory of their god and passed into the collective memory? Is it admissible that the Ancient Israel’s scribes would have voluntarily

⁴ See line 4 of the second Kamose’s stela (Luxor Museum J.43).

⁵ *Against Apion*, I, 14, 82.

represented their ancestors as enslaved in a foreign country⁶? Is the silence of the extra-biblical sources sufficient to exclude that a tenuous core of historical truth could have given birth to some of the stories contained in *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and their corollaries?

If we except some anti-Jewish legends peddled in the Hellenistic Period, the silence of the Egyptian sources about an eventual Hebrews' stay in the Delta – of which their eviction or their flight would have put an end – is absolute. Nevertheless, we cannot take out that the pharaohs of the New Kingdom could have included among those they called *ḥmw*, *sttjw* or *mntw* (“Asians” but particularly “Levantine Semitic-speaking people”), men from *rtnw* (“people of Syria-Palestine”), *ššsw* (“Bedouins”), *šmḥw* (“foreign vagabonds”) a human group whom the descendants would later enter the Israelite confederacy in the northern highlands of Canaan. The Egyptians would have been unable to distinguish them from other Asiatic peoples settled in the Delta and North-Sinai or itinerant in Canaan for the simple reason that what will become the Israelite specificity (a common identity linking the members of this community to an eponymous ancestor) did not yet exist. As writes James Hoffmeier, *the Hebrews [...], as the Genesis narratives portray them, were pastoralists and as such did not have a homeland or associate with a nation per se*⁷. Thus, the idealized image of the Biblical “Israel” described as a people already formed in the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE is a figment of the imagination of scribes persuaded (or wanting to persuade) that their nation plunged its roots into a distant past.

THE HEBREWS

The ethnonym “Hebrew” (*‘ibri*) and its derivatives come from the West Semitic dialect used by the writers of the *Bible*. We find it in Gn 14:13 as a gentilice given to Abraham (*‘abrām hā‘ibrī*). Elsewhere, it is either put into the mouth of foreigners (Egyptians and Philistines) or used to distinguish Israel from aliens⁸. In fact, it derives from the root of

⁶ They did so later (Ps 137), representing themselves sitting and crying *by the rivers of Babylon* (where, besides, they were not slaves), but the Exile is a historical event.

⁷ Hoffmeier 2016: 6.

⁸ BDB 1906: 720.

the verb *‘āḥar*, “to pass over, to cross”⁹. In the literature, the term *‘ibrī(m)* applied to persons is not found anywhere else than in the *Bible* and only 34 times¹⁰. Its building from the verb *‘āḥar* seeks to accredit by etymology the Deuteronomist assertion that the ancestors of this so-called people had once “passed over” the Euphrates¹¹. The archeology contradicts this claimed “transeuphratean” origin and reveals the Canaanite extraction of a wide part of the population of the former kingdoms of Israel and Judah¹².

In this study, we will call “Hebrews” the possible ancestors of Canaanite elements – and external – who had gathered together one day to form the Israel confederacy (future kingdom of Samaria) around the end of the 2nd millennium BCE. Undoubtedly, the Biblical sojourn in Egypt does not concern the Judean confederacy (future kingdom of Jerusalem). The Jerusalemite scribes merely resumed the Israelite tradition: first, after 722 BCE, date of the fall of Samaria under the Assyrian yoke; secondly, between the Egyptian 26th Dynasty and the Persian Domination (i.e. between 664 and 404) and even later.

In the Israelite source, the good Joseph’s brother is the Israelite Reuben and the exodus is described as an expulsion; in the Judean re-writing, the good Joseph’s brother became the Judean Judah and the exodus is described as an escape¹³.

In absence of conclusive evidence, we will not link the Hebrews to those that the Egyptians of the New Kingdom named *ḥprw*, nomadic populations that can also be found listed under spellings roughly similar in contemporary Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hittite and Mitannian texts. In literature, this appellation refers to people’s lifestyle. The *Apiru* are always presented, sometimes as mercenaries, workers or prisoners, sometimes as

⁹ BDB 1906: 716. See also Knobel 1850: 176 ff.

¹⁰ Gn 14:13; 39:14, 17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32; Ex 1:15, 16, 19; 2:6, 7, 11, 13; 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 21:2; Dt 15:12 (twice); 1Sa 4:6, 9; 13:3, 7; 14:11, 21; 29:3; Jr 34:9 (twice), 14; Jon 1:9.

¹¹ We find another attestation of this etymology in Gn 10:24, in the personal name given by the tradition to the *‘ibrīm*’s eponymous ancestor, Eber (*‘ēḥer* means “region beyond [a natural border]”). This character is given in Gn 10:25-29 (tradition flap existing before the introducing of Abraham in historiography) for the “father”, not only of Hebrews, but also of Arabs through his son Yokthan. Later, when it was decided to attribute to Abraham the paternity of these two nations, Yokthan was retrieved by the Priestly tradition which bound him in Abraham’s posterity as Yokshan (Gn 25:1-2).

¹² Finkelstein – Silberman 2002: 98, 107, 118.

¹³ See Redford 1970a: 141; Finkelstein – Römer 2014, 6.

nomadic robbers, or looters. When their names are given, they reveal so many origins that it renders illusory an ethnic sense of the term¹⁴.

THE HYKSOS

The term Ὑκσῶς is a Greek exonym used as an ethnonym. It refers to nomad population groups of Canaanite origin (what does not exclude that some elements of other peoples may have been involved in the so-called Hyksos). They settled in Avaris, an important fluvial haven on the Nile Pelusiac branch (present Tell el-Dab‘a)¹⁵, and then dominated the Lower and Middle Egypt (and ephemerally a part of Upper Egypt) from the 17th to the 16th century BCE. Challenged by legitimate leaders retreated in Thebes and other southern cities, they ended up being attacked. Overthrown c. 1520 BCE¹⁶, they were banned by the pharaoh Nebpehtira Ahmose (II)¹⁷, founder of the 18th Dynasty.

According to Flavius Josephus, the term Ὑκσῶς would have been created in the 3rd century BCE by the Egyptian priest Manetho (likely Μάνεθωσ or Μαναίθωσ) of Sebennytos¹⁸, author of a three-volumes “History of Egypt” entitled *Aigyptiaka*.

Unfortunately, Josephus cannot be considered as a reliable source. First, it is quite unlikely that he ever had before him the original text of Manetho’s *Aigyptiaka*. He sojourned in Egypt shortly, when he accompanied Vespasian around 69 CE, and it is improbable that, during his stay, he went to the Library of Alexandria to consult and copy Manetho’s work. The same year, he rejoined Titus at Jerusalem and, after the crushing of the Jewish revolt and the ruin of the Second Temple, he returned to Rome and there ended his life under Trajan, about 100 CE. *Against Apion*, eminently polemical work – thus “directed” –, was Josephus’ penultimate work, written in Rome around 96 CE. This implies that the quotations of Manetho it holds come very probably from a copy of an

¹⁴ Finkelstein – Silberman 2002: 103; Pury (de) 2005: 1022; Rouault 2005: 1026; Rainey 2008: 51-55.

¹⁵ Avaris is the Greek name of *ḥwt-wꜣrt*, “Castle of the desert district” (*Wb* I: 287-288). Faulkner 1991: 58 gives “desert-plateau” as an “administrative division of Egypt”).

¹⁶ We follow Vandersleyen 1995’s chronology.

¹⁷ Biston-Moulin 2012: 61-71. (In the present study, the nomen Ahmose refers to Nebpehtira Ahmose. When we will speak of his namesake predecessor, we will specify his prenomen: Senakhtenra).

¹⁸ *Against Apion*, I, 14, 82.

unknown author (maybe written in Greek, but it is not certain) which circulated in Rome. Two centuries later, when Eusebius of Cesarea quotes Josephus in his *Preparation for the Gospel*, the copy of *Against Apion* he has before him has already received “corrections”: the term Ὑκσως has become Ὑκουσσως¹⁹ and the spelling of the royal names given by Josephus have also changed. (The differences are too numerous to be a succession of Eusebius’ mistakes.)

Second, Josephus’ etymology of the term Ὑκσως is wrong: it claims that “*hyc*” in the sacred language means king and “*sos*” means pastor. Manetho could not make such a mistake. Senior priest charged by the two first Ptolemy of the royal mission to write a history of his country from the beginning, he wrote in Greek but spoke Egyptian, his mother language, and was surely able to read the different Egyptian scriptures. In Egyptian, the name corresponding to “Hyksos” has another significance, that Manetho seems to have given and which can be found, distorted, in the translation of “*hyk*” (which really means “chief, leader”) by “king”. The translation of “*sos*” by “pastor” is incorrect and probably result of a copyist’s will to subject the text to his own views²⁰. Third, the terms Ὑκσως and βασιλεῖς ποιμένες only appear in this passage of *Against Apion*. Elsewhere, Josephus never uses again the term *Hyksos* and employs *poimenes* never again preceded by *basileis*.

Third, another copy of Manetho’s work is mentioned in Josephus’ next sentence. It states that the term “*hyc*” does not mean kings, but indicates, on the contrary, captive shepherds. For, in Egyptian, “*hyc*”, and “*hac*” would mean captive²¹. This etymology, as inaccurate as the previous one, refers to a legend told by the 4th century BCE philosopher and historian Hecateus of Abdera. It was maybe quoted in the lost work of Ptolemy of Mendes (1st century BCE)²² of which the grammarian Apion (1st century CE) had copied out some excerpts, according to Clement of Alexandria²³.

¹⁹ *Preparation for the Gospel*, X, 13.

²⁰ In reality, what Manetho’s compilers have understood as *sos* means “foreign”, as we will see below.

²¹ *A. Ap.*, I, 14, 83.

²² Copyist of Manetho, according to Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, XIX, 6.

²³ *Stromata*, VI, 21, 69-70.

The pejorative appellation of pastors applied to the Hyksos is earlier than Manetho's time. In one of his numerous misunderstandings, Herodotus already employs it about the same populations²⁴. Furthermore, the passages of *Aigyptiaka* copied by Africanus and Eusebius, and later provided by Syncellus, show that Manetho did not operate this linkage and held the Hyksos, not for pastors, but for *phoinikes xenoï basileis*²⁵; i.e., kings of this region of Canaan which, at the time he wrote, had become Phoenicia²⁶, what seems to be confirmed by the second Kamose's stela, on which the contemporary king of Avaris, Aauserra Apopi, is called *wr-rṯnw*, “great of Retjenu” (= Syria-Palestine)²⁷. Some authors have linked the Hyksos to the Hurrians²⁸, although no document written in Hyksos language (which remains unknown) has never been found. The personal names of the Hyksos rulers engraved on scarabs are mostly transcribed with alphabetic hieroglyphs (often damaged), what implies that their reading, their pronunciation and, inevitably, their etymology, is hazardous.

In Genesis, a gloss says that *for the Egyptians, all [who] shepherding a flock are an abomination*²⁹. It was true that the goat was regarded as an unclean animal, and that the goatherds were kept away from the residences areas, but it did not go as far as the abomination. This assertion is irrelevant. Moreover, herding was not an exclusive Asiatic occupation; there were also Egyptians herders. This gloss was probably inserted during the Persian Domination on Egypt. It might be a witness of indigenous recriminations about the sacrifices of caprine practiced by the Jewish communities, particularly in Elephantine, where the god Khnum, the poliad divinity, was represented by a ram or a ram-headed man. In reality, it was the vagrants that the Egyptians had in repugnance. Like all sedentary peoples, they had a negative view on the “Bedouins” of their time, goats herders, occasionally “chickens thieves”, who lurked in their eastern border. Long before

²⁴ *Inquiry*, II, 128.

²⁵ Syncellus, *Ekloge chronographias*, frag. 43, *kata Afrikanon*; frag. 48, *kata Eusebion* in Waddell 1964: 90 ff.; 94 ff;


²⁶ According to Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 2, 21, Phoenicia began at the east of the border-town he calls *Pelousion*.

²⁷ Luxor Museum J. 43, line 4. See Habachi 1972; Redford 1997: 13-15; Dessoudeix 2010: 47. Contra: Ryholt 1997: 131.

²⁸ Especially Helck 1993: 60-66; Valbelle 2005: 1106.

²⁹ Gn 46:34.

the time of the Hyksos, the Sumerians were already watching with antipathy *ces nomades [...] qui occupent la steppe, ignorent céréales, maisons et cités, mangeurs de viande crue, inéducables, ingouvernables et qui, une fois morts, ne sont même pas ensevelis selon les rites*³⁰.

The ancient Egyptian word for “shepherds” is *mniw*. This substantive transcribed in hieroglyphs includes the determinative  A33, which reproduces a curved advancing man with a backpack on the shoulder. It indicates an itinerant population. We find the same determinative in *šm3w*, “foreign vagabonds”, applied to nomads depending on water points to watering their flocks. The queen-pharaoh Hatshepsut refers to these vagabonds at line 37 of her Speos Artemidos Inscription, in which she claims to have restored what had been demolished when the *šmw* were in Avaris with *šm3w* in their midst³¹.



The resentment displayed by the royal propaganda of the 17th, 18th and 19th Dynasties towards the Hyksos kings did not appear to have been shared by all their contemporaries, judging by various preserved statements. By example, the eulogy formulation: *The king of Upper and Lower Egypt Aauserra, son of Ra Apopi, living forever as Ra, every day* applied in (or following) Apopi’s cartouche shows that this monarch was perfectly Egyptianized and considered as pharaoh by his subjects³². In fact, the Egyptians did not care about their sovereigns’ ethnicity. Belonging to a nation was then an irrelevant concept. From where one came, one was an Egyptian if lived in Egypt and behaved as Egyptian people, speaking the vernacular, revering local gods and respecting traditional customs. Several kings’ names of the 13th and 14th Dynasties (Qemaw, Khendjer, Qareh, Nehsy...) betrayed their foreign origin but this last did not seem to have been an obstacle to the sovereignty. The presence of their names in the Turin King List (*Turin Papyrus*;

³⁰ Bottéro 1986: 36.

³¹ URK IV, 383-391; ANET, 231; Allen 2002, 1-17. That highlights Hatshepsut’s subjectivity when she claims, on the following line, that the Hyksos kings ruled without Ra. Kim Ryholt (1997: 125), seems to adopt an idea of James Harris according to which Hatshepsut would have made this statement (without Ra) because the Hyksos kings included in the lists in her possession (which lists?) would not have been nominated by a throne name (which inevitably ends with Ra) but by their birth name. The hypothesis is attractive. Certainly, Hatshepsut was better informed than us on the names and the succession of the Hyksos kings, but we know that Khyam and Apopi bore throne names included Ra... As writes James Hoffmeier (2016: 16), *the use of Egyptian pharaonic titles and epithets demonstrates that the foreign rulers of Avaris sought to emulate Egyptian royal ideology. These kings embraced Re in their Egyptian names, a long-cherished feature of royal ideology in Egypt.*

³² Hayes 1973 : 62.

abrev. Turin P.) shows that they were recognized as pharaohs by their contemporaries³³. It is in this light that the main Hyksos kings of Avaris were regarded as real sovereigns. Originally foreigners, but probably born in Egypt, speaking Egyptian, and honoring Egyptian gods.

In fact, the term *Hyksos* is the Greek transcription of the Egyptian qualifier *ḥk3-ḥ3st*, “ruler of foreign [lit. mountainous] countries”. In hieroglyphs, the first sign of this designation,  *ḥk3* (S38), is a crook, shepherd’s hooked staff used to catch and hold the sheep by the leg. It might have generated the image of pastors in Greek writers’ mind. The word *ḥk3* implies a concept of authority. The pharaoh was the shepherd of his people³⁴; so, the crook became his scepter, as is still today the Episcopal crosier which origin is the same. Leaving aside the phonetic complements, the following sign,  *ḥ3st* (N25), is a hilly landscape, “foreign” to Egypt considered by its natives as a flat country. Repeated three times in superposition or followed by the plural three traits (or another form of the plural), its reading is *ḥ3swt*. The appellation *ḥk3-ḥ3swt* was not new but conventional. In the Old Kingdom, it was already used to designate the Nubian chiefs. From the Middle Kingdom, it was applied to the peoples of the Levant and, later still, to the Libyans³⁵, which denies any ethnic connotation. Except the Turin P., no Egyptian writing names the Hyksos kings with the term *ḥk3(w)-ḥ3swt*. There were only the Asian leaders Sem-qen (*smkn*), Aper-Anati (*ʿpr-ʿnti*), Anat-Her (*ʿnt-hr*), Seker-Her (*skr-hr*) and Khayan (*hy3n*) to voluntarily include this epithet in their titulature³⁶, which also denies

³³ Redford 1970b: 9-10, based on extracts from Manetho, denies this royal recognition to the Hyksos kings because the founder of the 15th Dynasty had seized Egypt by force, as, later, will do the founder of the 25th Dynasty, which Manetho calls “Ethiopian”, while he never mentions the Libyan origin of the 22nd, 23rd and 24th Dynasties. Yet, it is not sure that the Hyksos invasion by force related in *Against Apion* is from the hand of Manetho (first it is spoken of an invasion without difficulty or fight). It is true that, on the Turin P., the six Great Hyksos kings, and only them, seem to have been called *ḥk3-ḥ3swt* (and not *nswt-bity*) but maybe, in the time of Ramses II, when the Turin P. was written, *ḥk3-ḥ3swt* would have acquired a pejorative meaning that it had not previously. We do not forget that the P. Turin is an aggregate of older king-lists (see the abundance of the term *ḥw-df3*, “erased”) and that we do not know what held originals.

³⁴ See the verb *mn*i, “to pasture, to act as a shepherd” applied to the king (*Wb* II, 75; Faulkner 1991: 108).

³⁵ Hayes 1973: 55; Vanderlesleyen 1995: 163.

³⁶ Ryholt 1997: 121 ff.; 125. Sem-qen's single attestation is a scarab-seal found at Tell el-Yahudiyeh on which he bears the title *ḥk3-ḥ3swt* (Basel 166). Idem for Aper-Anati (Petrie Museum UC 11655). Two scarabs only attest Anat-Her (Basel 165; Berlin 51/73). Seker-Her, who is probably one of the first Hyksos kings is known by a doorjamb excavated by Manfred Bietak at Tell el-Dab’a in 1993 at the lowest level of the Hyksos period (Cairo TD 8316); he could be the king Sharek mentioned by the *Genealogy*

any pejorative sense of the term at their time. It is noteworthy that it was only used to designate kings or rulers but never the population subordinate to the Hyksos kings, which was *probably a mixture of Egyptians, various Asiatic groups and people of mixed descent*³⁷.

EGYPTIAN SOURCES

The Egyptian king-lists do not help us. The Turin P. mentions six Hyksos kings but the names of five of them are lost due to irremediable damage of the document; it only keeps the nomen of the last one which reads Khamudy (*h^cmwdy*)³⁸ and, on the following line, the total of Hyksos kings (as 6) and a part of the figures of the total of their reign (which is generally accepted as 108 years). The identity of three of these six personages is still subject to debates which summary would go “out of topic”. Manetho’s epitomists give to the Hyksos kings various Hellenized names in which it is difficult to recognize an Egyptian equivalent. The only one who can be documented with certainty is Αφωφίς, which corresponds to the *ippi* (Apopi) of the monuments and probably to the lost name that appears in Turin P. 10/17, which assigns to this king a reign of 40+x years. Unfortunately, the nomen *ippi* is found with variants (*ʿ3pp*, *ipp*...) and with three different prenomina: *ʿ3wsrr*ʿ, *ʿ3knnr*ʿ and *nbhpr*ʿ. If we can place with certainty the reign of Ausera in parallel with the end of the 17th Dynasty, we do not know what to do with the two other ones. If Nebkheperesra seems to belong to the 14th Dynasty, we do not know if there were two kings named Apopi (Aaqenenra and Auserrea) in the 15th or if he is the same king who would have changed his titulature. The second identifiable name is that of Ἰαννάς, only given by Josephus, but who is most likely the son of Khayan, *ynss*, known as “king’s son” by a stela fragment discovered at Avaris³⁹; alas, there is no royal attestation of that name on the monuments.

of Ankhefensekhet (by metathesis of the *r* and the *k* of Seker). Khayan, much more attested, is undoubtedly one of the six Great Hyksos kings, maybe the second one.

³⁷ Bard 2015: 216.

³⁸ Turin P. 10/21. The six names seem apportioned on seven lines. We do not know where is exactly located the supernumerary line and what it contained.

³⁹ Bietak 1999, 36 and 75, fig. 13.

Another list, the *Genealogy of Ankhefensekhmet*⁴⁰, cites three Hyksos kings but two of them, Aaqen (ʿ3kn) and Sharek (š3rk), are not evidenced by monuments. As for the other indigenous king-lists (those of Saqqarah, Karnak, Abydos, etc.), they display a limited number of pharaohs, not always listed in chronological order, but all of them pass the Hyksos period in silence⁴¹.

The beginning of a legend concerning a dispute between the Hyksos king Apopi (probably Aauserra) and the Theban king Tao, copied late, has come down to us⁴². It seems to keep the memory of bad relations between the Theban court and that of Avaris, but one of the stelae erected by Kamose⁴³, who was the direct successor of Tao, as well as the Carnarvon Tablet I⁴⁴ seems to show the contrary for the time when Kamose acceded to the throne.

In absence of Hyksos names on the Egyptian King Lists, the copies of Manetho’s *Aigyptiaka* stays the most valuable source on the subject. The original work, the first which cuts Egyptian history in 30 dynasties, is lost. The contents of the three volumes which composed it is known from fragmentary – and often inaccurate – quotations held:

- in *Against Apion*, polemical work of the historian of Jewish origin Flavius Josephus (1st century CE);
- in the *Chronography* of the Christian historian of the 3rd century CE Sextus Julius Africanus;
- in the *Chronicles*, the *Preparations for the Gospel*, and the *Ecclesiastical history* of the bishop and Christian theologian of the 4th century CE Eusebius of Caesarea.

Africanus’ and Eusebius’ original texts are lost but an Armenian version of the Eusebius’ *Chronicles*, sometimes different, has been preserved, as well as a Latin translation of the tables of his second volume (*Chronological Canons*) included in Jerome

⁴⁰ Berlin 23673. Genealogy of a priest of Ptah who lived during the 21st Dynasty (c. 1000 BCE) and went back its ancestry to the end of the 11th (c. 2000 BCE).

⁴¹ The Egyptian kings had five names in their titlature: the Horus name, the Two-Ladies name, the Golden-Falcon name, the throne name (prenomen) and the birth name (nomen). We rarely know the overall names of the SIP monarchs, whom, on their monuments, are often called either by their prenomen or by their nomen, even by a nickname or a sobriquet.

⁴² Papyrus Sallier I / BM 10185. Wente 1973: 77-80.

⁴³ Temp. no. II.I.35.I. See Lacau 1939: 245-271.

⁴⁴ JE 41790, lines 6 and 7. See Gardiner 1916: 95-110.

of Stridon’s *Chronicles* (4th-5th century CE). Fortunately, most of the quotes of Africanus’ *Chronography* and the first volume of the Greek version of Eusebius’ *Chronicles* (*The Chronography*) were compiled around 800 CE by the Byzantine prelate George Syncellus in his own chronicles untitled *Ekloge chronographias*. We find also some references to Manetho in Plutarch (1st-2nd century CE), Porphyry of Tyre (3rd century CE), Diogenes Laertius (3rd century CE) or John Malalas (6th century CE), but they are of lower interest. We also know that some compilers, believing to quote Manetho had before them the *Epitome*, abstract of the *Aigyptiaka* written by an unknown author. This last work, brings the number of dynasties from 30 to 31, a sign of the possibility that it contains other additions or corruptions. In summary, we only know Manetho’s work by copies of copies of copies... which the oldest is subsequent than almost four centuries to the original, with what that implies of errors, omissions, glosses, and tendentious interpretations.

Manetho was often charged with anti-Jewish sentiments. Yet, nothing shows that he was the author of all the slanderous remarks on the Jews reported by Josephus as of his hand. Before him, the Greek-speaking authors had peddled anti-Jewish fables they seemed to hold from Egyptian informants. None refers to the arrival of the Hebrews in Egypt; all concern their expulsion and are related to the well-attested myth of the destructive flail sent by a deity because of the actions of a person or a people. This theme was already present in the biblical story of the plagues of Egypt, where it could have been taken and reversed by response. The most symptomatic of these stories has been preserved by Photius I, Patriarch of Constantinople in the 9th century CE, in a copy of a now lost extract of Diodorus Siculus’ *Library of History*. Diodorus there cited an excursus of Hecateus of Abdera⁴⁵ about the Jews, which recounted that, following an epidemic that affected Egypt, gods consulted would have attributed this hurt to a crowd of strangers of all kinds living in the country and practicing sacrilegious rites. The Egyptians would have decided to expel them. Some, the best, would settle in Greece (!), while the others, led by a chief named Moses would fix in an uninhabited country called Judea and there, would have founded a city they called Ἱεροσόλυμα (i.e. Jerusalem). Afterward, Moses would have given a legislation to these people, built the temple of their religion and divided them into twelve tribes. He would also have taught them *a way of life that turns away from*

⁴⁵The original text talks of Hecateus of Miletus, although the real author is Hecateus of Abdera. The mistake is ascribed to Photius.

other men and hostile to foreigners (ἀπάνθρωπόν τινα καὶ μισόξενον βίον)⁴⁶. This is, per Hecateus, what was already telling bout the Jews in Egypt some thirty years before Manetho⁴⁷.

According to a textual fragment from Josephus – which reproduces a version of Manetho’s text patently altered in two places – an exceptionally grave event would have occurred under the reign of a king whose name was distorted by a copyist:

[Τοῦ τίμαιος] Under him, it came to pass, I know not how, that God was averse to us; and there came, after a surprising manner, men of ignoble birth out of the eastern parts, and had boldness enough to make an expedition into our country, and with ease subdued it by force; yet without our hazarding a battle with them. So, when they had gotten those that governed us under their power, they afterward burnt down our cities, and demolished the temples of the Gods, and used all the inhabitants after a most barbarous manner. Nay some they slew, and led their children and their wives into slavery.

(A. Apion, I, 14, 75-76)

The king’s name under whose reign the stranglehold of these foreigners would be established on the Delta is transcribed τοο τίμαιος in Josephus’ text. This name is probably not Τίμαιος, as Eusebius transcribes it, but a probable error for Τootίμαιος. This Greek personal name could reproduce the nomen of a pharaoh of the 13th Dynasty: Dedumose. However, this identification remains uncertain and hardly disputed because it is mostly based on an acoustic similarity⁴⁸. Three stela and various fragments, scarabs and graffiti show two kings bearing that nomen: Djedhoteptra Dedumose and Djedneferra Dedmesu. The first is known by two stela discovered in Edfu⁴⁹; the second by a stela unearthed in Gebelein⁵⁰. The similarity of their nomen: *dd[w]-ms[w]*, “He who gives the birth[s]”, and the near similarity of their praenomen: respectively, *dd-htp-r*, “Stable is the satisfaction



⁴⁶ *Library of History*, XL,3, 1-8, Excerpt. Photii.

⁴⁷ The anti-Jewish legends of the Hellenistic Period could also find their origin in the gossips already spread in Egypt in the Persian Period about the Jewish mercenaries of the occupant.

⁴⁸ Discussion in El-Sayed 1979: 203-207.

⁴⁹ Stela JE 38917, see El-Sayed 1979: 166-186 and Pl. XLVII; Stela JE 46988, see El-Sayed 1979: 186-198 and Pl. XLVIII.

⁵⁰ Stela CG 20533, see Drioton – Vandier 1989: 288; Ryholt 1997: 262.

of Ra” and *dd-nfr-r^c*, “Stable is the perfection of Ra”, suggest that they belong to the same period⁵¹. But they also could be a single personage that would have changed a part of his titulature. The Turin P. 7/13 seems to mention only one Dedumose, but without providing his prenomen and whose nomen is partly erased:  *msw* (but the lacuna is sufficient to include the verbal form *ddw*). This mention of a single Dedumose (if it is indeed this king) might as well reflect a scribe’s confusion that the uniqueness of these two personages. That would be the same king who would change his titulature after being pushed out by the so-called Σάλιτις, the first Great Hyksos king of Manetho, and have taken refuge in Thebes. This last option, although fragile and unsupported by documentation, may not be excluded⁵². Dedumose is the last pharaoh of the 13th Dynasty really attested by the monuments. The Turin P., which does not know the dynastic division we are used to, cites a dozen royal names after  *msw* in its seventh column but they probably do not belong to the same “lineage”.

In Josephus’ text quoted above, we find a second discrepancy: the invasion of Egypt, first described without difficulty or fight, is recounted in the following phrase in a context of extreme ferocity strangely reminiscent of the conduct that the Egyptians of the Hellenistic Period attributed to Cambyses II. It perhaps comes out of the “other copy” which Josephus speaks of or an addition left by a commentator. Historically, it seems more likely that, in a quarter of a century, after that Avaris has passed under the Asian control, some Hyksos princelings took possession of other cities in the indifference of the natives. Until, c. 1630 BCE, Memphis, the glorious capital of the Old Kingdom, falls in the hands of one of them. Although no textual evidence informs us on this point, that is probably how we should understand what Manetho meant by invasion with ease and without a fight. The current Egyptology no longer sees this “invasion” as a sudden and brutal conquest led by hordes with superior weaponry, mounted on horse-drawn war chariots, legions against which the Egyptians would have remained helpless⁵³. Janine Bourriau’s excavations in Memphis show that the Hyksos invasion and sackings are

⁵¹ *Contra*: Siesse 2016: 123-134, who, in a very interesting onomastic study, places them, one at the beginning of the 13th Dynasty and the other at the end. For his part, Ryholt 1997: 262, sees also two Dedumose (father and son) but place them in the 16th Dynasty as *kings whose exact position is uncertain*.

⁵² Franke 1988: 258 ff.; Redford 1970b: 2, note 1.

⁵³ Already Säve-Söderbergh 1951: 53-71; Hayes 1973: 55; Drioton – Vandier 1989: 288 ff.

merely a fiction⁵⁴. The grip of the Delta by the Hyksos appears to have resulted more from the passivity of the Egyptians than on a large-scale warlike action – of which it subsists moreover no track.

In fact, the Hyksos’ ancestors arrived in the Nile Valley peacefully, at the request of the pharaohs of the 12th Dynasty. Senusret II (1881-1873) had already installed Asian people in Lower and Middle Egypt, in the context of the Fayum development and construction projects; later, Amenemhet III (1853-1809) did the same with regard to activities little practiced by the Egyptians, as maritime trade⁵⁵, what seems confirmed by the discovery of funerary objects related to the sea in the non-Egyptian burials of the urban area of Avaris⁵⁶. The apparent apathy of the kings of the following dynasty (the 13th one) against an increasingly massive Canaanite immigration⁵⁷ allowed these foreigners to join and to emancipate themselves of the royal power. After having more or less peacefully taken the power from town to town, one of them would come to seize the Lower Egypt throne in Memphis c. 1630 BCE. Unfortunately, nothing remains of the contemporary Egyptian literature about the troubled times in which these people overwhelmed the north of the country and ravished power from the native kings as severe was the determination with which the first pharaohs of the New Kingdom attached themselves to obliterate these events. Only stay some dithyrambic Egyptian texts about the reconquest of the Delta, a legend concerning the Hyksos king Apopi copied belatedly, a notation written at the time of the Hyksos king Khamudy, some building blocks bearing the titlature of any Hyksos king, some vessel pieces, few usurped statues and numerous scarab-shaped seals or amulets scattered in the north-eastern Delta, so that in Nubia, North-Sinai, and Palestine. These scarab-seals, often carved in hard stones, bear or Egyptian prenomina or West Semitic-sounding nomina mostly unknown. The chronological sorting of these artifacts by their typology is still subject to debate.

Once settled in Memphis and Avaris, the Great Hyksos kings appear to have delegated a part of their authority and their peripheral possessions to their siblings (“Lesser Hyksos”, local princelings whose names remain principally on scarabs) but also to native

⁵⁴ Bourriau 1997: 159-182.

⁵⁵ Petrie – Sayce – Griffith 1891: 5 ff.

⁵⁶ Forstner-Muller 2012: 10-13.

⁵⁷ Menu 2012a: 28 ff. and 2012b: 51-68; Hoffmeier 2016: 10 ff.

“princes”, in return for their allegiance, development of given areas and probable charges. These kinglets’ names often betray a Canaanite origin (Yaqb-amu, Anath-her, Sem-qen, Aper-Anath, Bebnem), but sometimes Egyptian (Pepy, Teti-An). Nothing is known of their sequence, duration of their reign, place of residence and territory over which they exercised their authority. More than thirty of these personages are identified by scarab-seals. A consensus had ranked them indiscriminately, some in the 14th Dynasty, others in 16th. Though they adopted a form of royal protocol, they had only ruled on local chiefdoms. Regarding Manetho and his copyists, they counted much more (76) but did not give their names.

In *Genesis*, the coming of Jacob’s clan in Egypt results from the royal authorization given to Joseph to install his siblings in the country⁵⁸. Given the “philosemitic” ambience of the context, an almost general agreement sets Hebrews’ possible arrival in Egypt, not in the Middle Kingdom, but in the Second Intermediate Period (abbrev. SIP), during the reign of a Hyksos king. In this study, we will presuppose that the so-called Hebrews could have been a part of a Lesser Hyksos group⁵⁹.

BIBLICAL SOURCES

The sources connected with the arrival of the Hebrews in Egypt, their sojourn, and their departure are essentially contained in three works: *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Numbers*. In none of these books (or elsewhere in the *Pentateuch*), the contemporary kings of these events are identified namely: they are always called *meleḵ miṣrayim*, “king of Egypt”, or *ḫar’ōh*, “Pharaoh”. This last term comes from the Egyptian *pr-ḥ*, “great house” primitive designation of the royal palace which became that of its occupant by metonymy. His first statement is attested in the middle of the 18th Dynasty but its use turned widespread only later. As anachronistic it is for sovereigns of earlier dynasties, it serves us to distinguish the kings of Egypt conveniently. The title *pr-ḥ*, transcribed *par’ōh*, then *ḫar’ōh*, in Hebrew, became *φαραώ* in the *Septuagint* (abbrev. LXX) and *pharaonis* in the *Vulgate*,

⁵⁸ Gn 45: 17-18.

⁵⁹ Hoffmeier 2016: 13 situates the “Proto-Hebrews” in the period “pre-Hyksos” of Avaris. I suppose that he assigns a so high a date to their arrival admitting the biblical account of a 430-years sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt.

hence the English *pharaoh*. The use of this title as a personal name simply shows that at the time of writing the story, the concerned king's name *was no longer known*. Herodotus, in his *Inquiry*, summarizes the statements of the Memphite priests about a king called Pheros⁶⁰, whose name is manifestly a Hellenization of *pr-ʿ3*. Either the interlocutors of Herodotus would have talked about a pharaoh without naming him and “the Father of History” would have taken the title for the king's name, or it would be a sign of a possible Egyptian origin of the process of appointing by its title a monarch which the name was fallen into oblivion⁶¹.

The arrival in Egypt is told by the patriarchal narratives:

- Gn 12:10-20 assigns one to Abraham, the legendary ancestor of the Judeans;
- Gn 26 assigned another one to Isaac, but it was removed from the biblical corpus, probably due to redundancy⁶²;
- Gn 46-50:3, the most coherent tradition, assigns this event to Jacob, the legendary ancestor of the Israelites.

We cannot take in consideration the story of Abraham's descent into Egypt. It was likely written after the Exile (like most of the histories relating to Abraham), while an older text already awarded this travel to Jacob. The animals offered to the patriarch by the pharaoh dazzled by the beauty of Abraham's spouse, Sara (dazzle all the more extraordinary that Sara is then supposed to be septuagenarian and widely menopausal), shows its lateness. The author of this tale takes Egyptian kings for the debauched Asian despots of his time, while the pharaohs, considered as divine incarnations, were subject to a strict court etiquette and were not accustomed to throwing their heart on indigent nomads' women for the purpose of fornication, and even less trade them against cattle. Indeed, Abraham would have received, among other things, “mules” (*ʾāṭōnōt*) and “camels” (*ḡāmallīm*). The *Samaritan Pentateuch* (abbrev. SAM), older than the Masoretic Text (abbrev. M.T.), does not quote the presents in the same order, sign of a rewriting by the author of the text on which worked the Masoretes between the 7th and 10th centuries CE. Given the late arrival of horses in Egypt (maybe around 1700 BCE⁶³, but commonly

⁶⁰ *Inquiry*, II, 111.

⁶¹ See El-Banna 2014: 7-13.

⁶² The trace of its deletion is still detectable in Gn 26:1-2.

⁶³ Meeks 2003: 51.

used around 1550), the donation of mules at this stage of the narrative is an anachronism. The same applies to the gift of “camels” (in reality, dromedaries), an animal which was not unknown in Egypt but was commonly used only until the 3rd century BCE⁶⁴, although it was common since longer in the Near East. The scribe has simply transferred to Egypt the marital barter type that was practiced in Canaan at his time. The archetype of this story dates from a period when horses, mules, and dromedaries were used in Judea, at the earliest in the 8th century BCE, but more likely later: between the 6th and the 3rd century BCE⁶⁵.

Once cleared of the section concerning the unlikely Sara’s kidnapping⁶⁶, Abraham’s adventures in the land of pharaohs summarizes in less than ten verses the constitutive elements of the events that the northerner (i.e. Israelite) tradition staged to Jacob and his descendants:

- Jacob’s clan went down to Egypt following a famine in Canaan. → Abraham goes down to Egypt following a famine in Canaan.
- Jacob’s clan had been well received and prospered. → Abraham is well received and enriched himself.
- Pharaoh had disliked Jacob’s descendants, following what, Yahweh had stricken the Egyptians with plagues. → Yahweh strikes Pharaoh with plagues and Abraham is disliked by Pharaoh.
- Jacob’s descendants were expelled [≠ had run away], accompanied [≠ pursued] by an army corp. → Abraham is expelled *manu militari*.

⁶⁴ Midant-Reynes – Braunstein-Silvestre 1977: 337-362; Boutantin 2014: 293-294.

⁶⁵ Another indication of the late arrival of the dromedary in Judea is that, originally, the Hebrew language does not possess word to describe the female of this animal. In the 6th century, under the influence of Assyria, where this animal was called *bakru* (*Annals of Ashurbanipal*, IX), ancient Hebrew began to name it by the masculine substantive *beker* related to the verbal form *bakar*, “giving birth to the first-born” (Assyr. *bukru*), but also by the homophone substantive *bāqār* (where the *kaph* is replaced by a *qoph*) relating to large cattle of all ages and sexes. A feminine suffix was then applied to it to name his female (*bikrāh* in Jr 2:23).

⁶⁶ Nomadic Semitic tribes practiced bride-abduction (See Jg 21) but this custom did not exist in Egypt (except, perhaps, in the case of “war grips”).

The extraneous origin of Abraham’s Egyptian “interlude” is also revealed in the fact that the texts concerning Jacob or Joseph never makes them evoke a sojourn in Egypt of their ancestor.

In the end of *Genesis*, a work called the “Novel of Joseph” was also inserted. This is a late period document written for the first time in Egypt, probably towards the middle of the 26th Dynasty (around 600 BCE). It relates the arrival of Joseph, son of Jacob, in the Nile Valley and his ascension at the court of an unnamed king. Yahweh does not appear in it. This wisdom teaching exalts the qualities of chastity, modesty, kindness, and mercy of its hero. When redesigning the future biblical corpus towards 350 BCE (between the middle of the Persian Period and the beginning of the Hellenistic Period), this story, already altered by pre-exilic, then post-exilic retouches, was incorporated into Jacob’s saga.

The incursion into Egypt by groups corresponding to the biblical description of Abraham’s or Jacob’s family was a recurring phenomenon since earliest antiquity. It is well documented in the literature. According to the *Prophecy of Neferti*,⁶⁷ from the Middle Kingdom (but surely already before), *ḥmw* drought victims came, *according to their custom*⁶⁸, implore for water to let their flocks drink. Eight centuries later, under Merenptah, a border guard of the Wadi Tumilat area records in his report having let pass *šsw of Edom through the fortress of Tjeku, by the ponds of Per-Atum, to keep them and their herds alive*⁶⁹. Other Egyptian sources confirm Canaanite immigrants’ installation in the Delta during the SIP⁷⁰. It remains to be known whether one or another minor group of these foreigners – and not as their whole – could correspond to certain ancestors of these Canaanites which will become later the Israelites and will transmit the tradition.

The biblical account of the installation of the “sons of Israel” in the so-called “country of Goshen” place them in the later Egypt time where the narrator lived: an Egypt where the Hyksos rule had for a long time disappeared from popular memory. A remembrance thereof could, however, subsist in the story of Joseph, in which the Patriarch amounted to

⁶⁷ Papyrus Hermitage 1116B, 65-71

⁶⁸ Givon 1971: 133; Helck 2000: 60.

⁶⁹ Papyrus Anastasi VI, 51-61: *ANET*, 259. This compassion for *ḥmw* under Merenptah invalid the theory making this king the wicked Pharaoh of the Exodus.

⁷⁰ See Menu 2012a: 28 ff. and 2012b: 51-68.

a function that does not seem to be that of the vizier, as it is often written, but that of the royal treasurer. Indeed, Joseph takes, on his own, only economic decisions. Perhaps it is an isolated fortuity, given the late time of writing of this romanced piece, but it seems that, under the Hyksos rule, the function of the vizier has disappeared: the chief executive of the Administration bore the title of the Royal Treasurer⁷¹.

The use of the place-name “land of Goshen” to name the region where the Hebrews had been installed shows that its original appellation was forgotten. Goshen (*gōšēn*) does not come from Egyptian but from West Semitic language. A region of Goshen existed in the south of the mountains of Judea, between Gaza and Gibeon, where was located a city that bore the same name⁷². No satisfactory etymology of Goshen has been proposed. For Egypt, it seems to correspond to the area of the Wadi Tumilat, at the east of the tip of the Delta. The LXX translates it by *ge Gesem Arabia*. For the Greek-speaking authors, Arabia territory began on the right bank of the eastern branch of the Nile Delta.

Following the general opinion situating the descent of the Hebrews in Egypt during the SIP, we could (hypothetically) consider that a clan of nomads, driven out from their wandering countries by famine or, as in Joseph’s Novel, by “brothers” (other Bedouins, themselves being driven out by the arrival of other peoples?) would have been authorized by a Hyksos king to settle in the region of Wadi Tumilat. He might have become one of those Lesser Hyksos groups unknown by Egyptian historiography, while they remembered for a long time *the fish they ate [...] for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic*⁷³ of this “land of Cockaigne”.

Genesis closes on the installation of Jacob’s clan in Goshen. Their stay in this place is told in the following book entitled *Exodus*. This work was probably written in Jerusalem during the reign of Josiah (639-609 BCE) based on a nucleus of ancient northerner traditions. Some allusions of the prophets Amos and Hosea, who can be situated in Samaria a century earlier, around 750 BCE, suggest the existence of these traditions⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Helck 1958: 79-80; Ryholt 1997: 59-61 counts five Royal Treasurers evidenced by scarabs-seals.

⁷² Jos 10:41; 11:16; 15:51.

⁷³ Nb 11:5.

⁷⁴ Am 2:10; 3:1; 9:7; Hos 11:1; 13:4.

There is no reference to the events known by archeology, as the slow reconquest of Middle and Lower Egypt by the Theban rulers.

Exodus opens with the enslavement of the Hebrews by the Egyptians. Goshen is suddenly presented as a place of oppression where the sons of Israel are subjected to forced labor, obliged to make earthen bricks under the care of cruel wardens. This tradition of servitude is late and superadded; the oldest narratives did not talk about it. *Dans le récit de la Genèse, à aucun moment ne sont maltraités en Égypte les fils de Jacob. [...] Le thème de l’esclavage aurait été incorporé par hostilité à l’égard de l’Égypte*⁷⁵. However, we will see below that this theme could arise from real events largely distorted.

THE LENGTH OF THE STAY

According to Ex 12:40, the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt would have lasted 430 years. It was noted long ago that this figure was discrepant with that given by Gn 15:13 (400 years), and even more so with that given by Gn 15:16 (four generations, i.e. a period covering, roughly a century by present standards, or maximally 160 years if it is believed that the *Bible* gives 40 years to a generation). It has been argued that the substantive *ḏōr*, “generation”, has *a rather fluid meaning and does not necessarily represent a fixed figure*, and must be linked to the 400 years given by Gn 15:13⁷⁶. Effectively, *ḏōr* has a fluid meaning, but why should this term represent here *a fixed figure* of 100? We know that verses 13 and 16 are additions to a basic narrative which described a covenant sacrifice offered by Abraham⁷⁷. The priestly genealogy of Moses given in Ex 6:14-20 (although fabricated and late it is) grants a period of a four-generations stay. It tells that Levi (Jacob’s son), who arrived at the adulthood in Egypt, gave birth to Kehat (1st generation), who gave birth to Amram (2nd generation), who gave birth to Moses and Aaron (3rd generation). This third generation is supposed to have left Egypt with Moses and having wandered 40 years in the wilderness before dying, and this is the next generation (the 4th), which would have reached Canaan under Joshua’s leadership, corroborating Gn 15:16:

⁷⁵ Teixidor 2003, 88-89.

⁷⁶ Hoffmeier 2016: 4.

⁷⁷ BJ 1998 :56, b.

*Then in the fourth generation they will return here (in Canaan)*⁷⁸. It was also a period of four generations which advocated Josephus, however giving it a strange length of 170 years (40 years per generation, and 10 years added for personal reasons?)⁷⁹.

Those who give credit to a 430-years sojourn, rarely expose the reason for this choice. This seems finally the result of an old consensus entered in usage. Yet we know that an earlier tradition, echoed by the LXX, included the stay of the sons of Israel *in Canaan* during this period of 430 years, what considerably reduces the Egyptian episode⁸⁰. Moreover, the SAM, prior to the LXX, tells about the stay in Canaan of the sons of Israel *and their fathers (wa’āḥōtām)*⁸¹, which includes the stay in Canaan reckoned to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel, and further reduces the Egyptian period. As we see, about the stay into Egypt, the discrepancy between the M.T. and the older versions is huge.

The length of four generations corresponds roughly to the Hyksos’ stay in Egypt given by the Turin. P. (108 years) and the Armenian copy of Eusebius (103 years). On the other hand, Herodotus mentions a total of 106 years during which Egypt was plunged into a complete misery. *During that time, he writes, the temples were closed. In their hatred of those kings, the Egyptians absolutely refused to pronounce their names*⁸². Herodotus talks here about Cheops and Chephren, kings whose he projects a millennium after their days and attributes an exaggerated length of reign. It is clear that, on this point, Herodotus got confused in his sources because it is exactly in these terms that some pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty have spoken about the Hyksos. Two elements of Herodotus’ text denounce his confusion. The first is that he evokes a *poimen* (“shepherd”: epithet applied to the Hyksos) who was grazing his cattle at the place he speaks (Memphis and surroundings); the second is that he calls this shepherd *Philitis*, name he takes for an anthroponym while it is an ethnonym closer to the Philistines, mistakenly identified with the Canaanites who constituted the main of Hyksos people. As noted by William Waddell, it seems that

⁷⁸ It is of course only talking here about “generations”, regardless of the physiologically impossible longevity assigned to all these fictional personages.

⁷⁹ *A. Ap.*, I, 33, 299.

⁸⁰ LXX Ex 12:40 gives exactly: ἡ δὲ κατοίκησις τῶν υἱῶν ἰσραὴλ ἦν κατ’ὥκησαν ἐν γῇ αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ἐν γῇ χανααν ἔτη τετρακόσια τριάκοντα, “The stay the sons of Israel did in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan had lasted four hundred and thirty years”.

⁸¹ For the text of the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, see Sigalov in the bibliography.

⁸² *Inq.*, II, 128.

Herodotus has confused two periods of alleged oppression: that of the builders of the two Great Pyramids of Giza and that of the Hyksos⁸³.

If the Hebrews came in Egypt under the reign of a Hyksos king, a stay of 430 years would send their exodus – depending on the (unknown) date of their arrival – between the reign of Ramses II (1279-1212 BCE) and that of Tausert (1188-1186 BCE). A stay of four generations, by cons, would place their exodus in the first half of the 18th Dynasty.

Whatever has been said, the *First Book of the Kings* does not help us. It fixes the start of the building of the Temple of Jerusalem in Solomon’s 4th regnal year, *the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Yisra’el were come out of the land of Mitsrayim*⁸⁴. Solomon is believed to have lived in the first half of the 10th century BCE, 480 years would return us again at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, but, although this figure is more likely to strengthen our hypothesis, we cannot take it into consideration. First, because of the chronological anchoring of Solomon – and even its existence – is far from being sure. Second, because these 480 years is the product of 12 times (one per tribe) 40 years. Therefore, we know that the numerous periods of *forty years* punctuating Bible stories still represent a concealed confession of ignorance. Thus, the authors of the *Exodus*, unaware of Moses, attributed him 120 years of life: 40 in Egypt, 40 in Midian, and 40 in the wilderness. Other biblical authors, unaware of the length of Saul’s reign, had set it at 40 years, as indicated by the tradition resumed by Ac 13:21. The author of the *First Book of the Kings*, who knew nothing about David and Solomon, gave them each a reign of 40 years⁸⁵. Israel Finkelstein gives to the biblical number 40 a typological value⁸⁶. The fact that here, these 40 years are multiplied by the symbolic figure of 12 makes this period of 480 years more than suspicious.

A Syncellus’ excursus places Joseph’s arrival in Egypt in the 4th regnal year of the king he calls Αφωφης (surely the Great Hyksos king Apopi):

Some say that this king [i.e. Apophis] was at first called Pharaoh and that in the 4th year of his kingship Joseph came as a slave into Egypt. He appointed Joseph

⁸³ Waddell 1964: 76-77, note 1.

⁸⁴ 1 K 6:1.

⁸⁵ 1 K 1:11 and 11:42.

⁸⁶ Finkelstein 2013: 48, 84-85, 106. (AN: artificial classification facilitating the analysis of a more complex reality.)

lord of Egypt and all his kingdom in the 17th year of his rule, having learned from him the interpretation of the dreams and having thus proved his divine wisdom.

(Syncellus, Ek. Chron., 204)⁸⁷

Here Syncellus does not give his sources but we know that in this fragment, he compiles the *Book of Sothis*, which he believes to come from an original of Manetho. He ignores that this book (inspired by Josephus' and Eusebius' lists) was written in the late 3rd century CE. It is quite probable that the unnamed authors of this claim are none other than Syncellus himself. He probably gives this precision from a personal calculation: starting from a date found somewhere and according to the (inaccurate) reign-lengths given by Josephus and Eusebius, he would have fallen in the fourth year of king “Apophis”. Furthermore, he writes that this king learned from Joseph the interpretation of the dreams. The famous “dream of Pharaoh”, of which no soothsayer of the court had managed to find the key, is told in the story of Joseph: seven fat cows are devoured by seven thin cows and seven beautiful ears of wheat are gobbled up by seven faded ears. Brought in front of the king, Joseph deciphers the dream in the following way: seven years of abundance are going to arise on Egypt, immediately followed by seven years of famine. And he adds that Pharaoh would be well inspired to find immediately a wise man to organize the putting in reserve of the food during the first seven years so that the seven following ones do not ruin the nation⁸⁸. The symbolism of this dream is linked to the cycle of Baal, Semitic god of the Thunderstorm and the Fertility. In the Canaanite imagery, the fruiting role of Baal appears under two aspects: that of a bull fecundating a heifer and that of the wheat. According to the Ugaritic mythology, Baal delivers to Mot, god of the Death and the Infertility, a fight every seven years. His victory brings seven years of abundance; his defeat seven years of famine⁸⁹. A Hyksos king, Semite too, had to know the mythology of the Sacred Bull and his linkage to Baal; he would not have needed a charlatan to interpret his dream. The very orthodox prelate⁹⁰ who was Syncellus ignored it, as well as

⁸⁷ Waddell 1964: 239.

⁸⁸ Gn 41, 1-36.

⁸⁹ KTU 1.2 IV 10.

⁹⁰ Syncellus (Σύγκελλος) was not the patronym of this author but his title, *synkellos*, compound word from the Greek prefix *sun*, “with”, and the noun *kellion*, “cell”, which literally means “living in the same cell”. The *synkellos* was a prelate, both coadjutor and private secretary to the Patriarch of Constantinople that he accompanied everywhere and with whom, in principle, he shared the monastic cell. He often succeeded

the author of the story of Joseph, written a very long time after the events it claims to redraw.

The length of the Hebrews' sojourn in Egypt given by Gn 15:13 (400 years) is the round number of 10 periods of 40 years – probably because the writer of this verse had no information about it. As for the “430 years” of Ex 12:40, they were taken up in the oldest tradition, but forgetting they also included the wanderings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Canaan, as it was initially specified. The duration of those alleged wanderings, often given as 215 years, is actually unknown (but it is certainly not fortuitous that the period 430 years is exactly the double).

Finally, the argument that hurts the most such a long period is its narrative void. How accepting that no memory, no anecdote, has survived from this period of almost half a millennium, while the biblical scribes pretended to be instructed of so minute details, and even dialogues, about previous and following times?

Indeed, nothing happens – absolutely nothing – from Joseph's death to Moses' birth.

EGYPT, FROM THE 15TH DYNASTY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 18TH

Under the Hyksos rule, the Egyptian administration continued to work scrupulously in occupied Lower and Middle Egypt. The numerous “royal” names of that time kept by the Turin P. supports this assertion⁹¹. Most of Lower Egypt archives were probably destroyed in the disturbances inherent to the reconquest of the Delta and the few that could have survived, written on papyrus, was probably disintegrated in this region where the moisture is more important than in the South. As for the perennial monuments erected or usurped by the Hyksos (stelae, obelisks, palaces, temples, statues...), they would have been demolished in the early New Kingdom with an aim of *damnatio memoriae* or reused as blocking masonry in subsequent buildings now lost, or even destroyed, like so many

him but that was not the case of George, who declined the function and retired to a monastery where he wrote his *Ekloge chronographias*, unfinished at his death about 810.

⁹¹ Although this document probably presents in bulk in its columns 8, 9 and part of 10 all the local leaders of Lower and Middle Egypt which one had retained the name (may they be indigenous, foreigners or invented) with apparently no regard to their chronological order or to the origin of the lists used for the elaboration of the reviews on which it is based.

others, over the centuries by lime burners for production of mortar, plaster and fertilizers. Regarding the statuary, it is significant that only usurped statues remain, while the Hyksos kings have certainly realized some at their own image, as shown by the deliberately smashed funerary statue of a high-ranking personage wearing Asian headdress and tunic found by Manfred Bietak in a tomb situated in the heart of a particular cemetery adjoining a palace of Avaris⁹².

Under the push of the first Hyksos kings, the legitimate native rulers were forced to retreat to the south. In the meantime, the 16th Dynasty had come to replace the deliquescent 13th in unknown circumstances. But everything goes wrong for these new leaders: they are, if not besieged, at least trapped in their capital, Thebes, and some other refuge-cities as Edfu and El-Kab, where they suffer from raids of the Nubian kingdom of Kerma⁹³. We ignore what the nature of their relations was with the Hyksos but it is reasonable to suppose that they were not friendly. We do not know more about the transition from 16th to 17th Dynasty. The situation does not change during the first half of the 17th dynasty. It seems that its first kings have declared allegiance to the Hyksos and paid tribute to prevent the fatal assault. But over time, the Asian occupant Egyptianized himself and become somehow softened. During his long reign of “40+x” years, Apopi sees his territory nibbled by the Theban kings Sobekemsaf, Nubkheperre Intef, Senakhtenra Ahmose, Tao, Kamose, and probably also by other princelings. Indeed, it seems that then other southerner kingdoms or chiefdoms exists as that of Thebes⁹⁴. According to Josephus, Manetho himself would have confirmed this fragmentation of the power: speaking about the reconquest of the country, he would have written:

Then the kings of Thebais and of the other parts of Egypt made an insurrection against the shepherds.

(A. Ap., I, 14, 85)

We find the same information in Artapanus of Alexandria (2nd century BCE) reproduced by Eusebius; according to this last author, at the time of Moses, *Egypt was*

⁹² Bietak 1999: 32 and 69, Fig. 5.

⁹³ Ilin-Tomich 2016: 8 ff.

⁹⁴ El-Sayed: 1979, 203, 206; Franke 1988: 259 ff.; Drioton – Vandier 1989: 295; Ryholt 1997: 163 ff., 191, 202, 264, 304.

*subject to a lot of kings*⁹⁵. The recent discovery of a royal necropolis at Sohag, near Abydos, which still contained the remains of a king named Woseribra Senebkay⁹⁶, hitherto known by a single artifact found in a private tomb of Abydos under the spelling Sebekay⁹⁷, seems to support the hypothesis of the existence of an ephemeral parallel dynasty in this town (or in Thinis). This supposition had been issued by Franke 1988 and deepened by Ryholt 1997 cited above. Was it the gradual reconquest of the country that prompted Apopi to change its title (formerly *nswt-bity*, “King of Upper and Lower Egypt”) in *ḥkꜣ n(y) ḥwt-wꜣrt*, “Chief of Avaris”?

When Ahmose ascends the throne of Thebes after the brief but eventful reign of Kamose, Apopi still governs the Delta and the Middle Egypt. But the new southerner king is still a child. So, the beginning of his kingship happens under the successive guardianship of his probable grandmother, Queen Tetisheri (Senakhtenra Ahmose’ widow) and his mother, Queen Ahhotep (Tao’s widow). Ahmose’s stelae of Karnak and Abydos⁹⁸, as well as the worshipping given to these two women by the following generations, indicate that they firmly administered the kingdom, without any concession to Apopi.

Some years later, became mature with full authority, Ahmose decides to continue the liberation work initiated by his predecessors. In the meantime, it seems that Apopi died and that Khamudy succeeded him at Avaris.

THE PHARAOH WHO DID NOT KNOW JOSEPH

Exodus opens with a brief reminder of Jacob’s brood. It is a compiler’s gloss wanting to connect *Exodus* to *Genesis*. The real story begins at the 8th verse and immediately enters into the heart of the matter:

Now a new king arose over Mitsrayim [i.e. Egypt], who did not know Yoseph.

⁹⁵ *Prep.*, VII, 27.

⁹⁶ See on the website of the Pennsylvania University: <*Giant Sarcophagus Leads Penn Museum Team in Egypt to the Tomb of a Previously Unknown Pharaoh*>

⁹⁷ Daressy 1903: 43, pl. XI, II, 93; Ryholt 1997: 340-341.

⁹⁸ Respectively CGC 34001 and CGC 34002.

Genesis tells us that Joseph was 30 years old at his promotion and died at the age of 110, i.e. 80 years (two periods of “40 years”) later. If the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt had lasted 430 years, it would have been obvious in the mind of the narrator (who believed firmly in the longevity of his hero) that a king ascended the throne three and a half centuries (430 years less the 80 years still lived Joseph) after the death of the patriarch, could not have known him! So, why specify it? One might also wonder why this pharaoh, and him alone, would not have known Joseph, on the contrary, apparently, of the many other kings who ruled in this interval of 350 years. Although the chronological indications of the *Bible* must always be taken *cum grano salis*, it seems nevertheless that for the first author, the time elapsed between the arrival of the Hebrews and their exodus was much shorter than that the many successive transcribers lead us to imagine.

The Chronicles of the Arab historian Abu Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (9th-10th century CE) also support this much shorter duration. This author gives to the king who had not known Joseph the name of Walid. He is presented as the son of a king Matsaab and the brother of a king Qabus to whom he had succeeded. Tabari names also the benefactor pharaoh of Joseph: he calls him Rayyan and grants him of a Semitic origin. The villain Walid (the new pharaoh) is also given as the husband of a queen Asiyyah, widow of his predecessor Qabus and *granddaughter of the benevolent Rayyan*⁹⁹. This allows inferring that the primitive author of the tradition to which Tabari drew did not believe in a length of 430 years of stay of the Hebrews in Egypt since at the time of the wicked pharaoh, the granddaughter of the benefactor of Joseph is still alive. Unfortunately, the original source is not cited, the Persian translator of Tabari (Abu-Ali Muhammad Al Balami) failed to copy the references given by his predecessor.

According to Pierre de Caprona, the genealogy delivered by Tabari could correspond to the brood of Tao, who would be Matsaab, Qabus being Kamose, and Walid Ahmose. This hypothesis, which is also likely to strengthen ours, is regrettably based on unconvincing comparisons: de Caprona notes that *walid* means “child” in Arabic and that Kamose’s and Ahmose’s names contain the Egyptian root *ms* which also means “child”¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁹ Zotenberg 1867: 215 ff., 291.

¹⁰⁰ Caprona (de) 1978: 139 ff.

1. The Arabic substantive *walid* can effectively mean “child” or “the one who arrives at the life” as far as it relates, with a tender significance, to the male newborn child. For its part, the Egyptian 𓂏 *ms* is the root of the verbal element *msi* which means “to give birth, lay, born, create...”; as substantive, it can mean “child” if it is followed by the determinative A17, which represents a seated child wearing a hand to the mouth, as 𓂏𓂏 ¹⁰¹. But it is not the case, either in Kamose’s titulature – 𓂏𓂏𓂏 *k^c-ms nht* – nor in Ahmose’s – 𓂏𓂏𓂏 *i^ch-msy* –, whose birth names respectively mean “The Bull is born - The Powerful One” and “Born from Iah (the Moon)”.
2. Ahmose inherited the throne while he was still a child, but no bond of brotherhood between Kamose and him is attested; there are only some scholars to suppose it. As for Kamose, he acceded to the kingship in adulthood: he is personally going to war against Apopi since his enthronement and he was apparently already a father.
3. Tabari also assigns a Semitic origin to Qabus and Walid, while Kamose and Ahmose were in no doubt pure Egyptians.
4. It does not appear that Ahmose’s Great Wife, Ahmose Nefertari, whose mummy was found in 1881 by Emil Brugsch in the cache of Deir el-Bahari, was initially that of his predecessor Kamose, and much less that she was the granddaughter of a Hyksos king: she was Ahmose’s sister, whose father was Tao and whose probable grandfather was Senakhtenra Ahmose. A forensic examination of her mummy showed that she was suffering from *retrognathia* (retraction of the lower jaw, giving the impression that the upper jaw is projected forward), characteristic of the Ahmosid lineage¹⁰². The same cache of Deir el-Bahari delivered us the mummy of a princess Satkamose, who was likely a daughter (*s3t*) of Kamose. She seems to have died around thirty years of age¹⁰³. Ahmose could have had this princess for a secondary wife, but the documentation does not support this union. Gaston Maspero claimed to have read *king’s daughter, king’s sister and king’s great royal*

¹⁰¹ *Wb*, II, 139 gives *das kind*.

¹⁰² Smith 1912: 14 -15.

¹⁰³ Smith 1912: 22.

wife written on the cloth which covered her chest¹⁰⁴, but Michel Gitton interprets the last-mentioned title, not as *hmt-nswt*, “king’s wife”, but as *hmt-ntr*, “god’s wife”¹⁰⁵. The term has roughly the same meaning (the god being the king – hence probably Maspero’s interpretation) but, however, it gives to this woman a more clerical than royal stature.

However, Pierre de Caprona’s hypothesis cannot be rejected, although the trend is rather to link Kamose, not to the siblings of Ahmose, given the age difference, but that of Tao. The mummy of Kamose, initially buried in the royal necropolis of Dra Abu el-Naga, later very damaged by successive violations and more or less efficient repairs, was discovered by Auguste Mariette in 1857 in a rather banal coffin, among the rubble, next to the entrance of the Valley of the Kings. When Mariette opened the sarcophagus, the corpse it contained disintegrated instantly, making impossible a clinical examination, but the precious well-preserved artifacts which accompanied the deceased related him undoubtedly to the Ahmosid family.

Maybe the primitive author of the tradition to which Tabari drew did not have bad information. The Southerner kings of that pivotal era might have practiced some ambiguous marital relations with the Hyksos kings. They would be recalled by the strange discovery of a vase fragment found in 1907 by Howard Carter in Dra Abu el-Naga, in the tomb attributed to Amenhotep I, son of Ahmose. This fragment mentions a certain *Herit*, *king’s daughter*¹⁰⁶. Until there, nothing extraordinary. What is surprising is that the name of this woman is enrolled in a cartouche which is adjacent to those of Aauserra Apopi¹⁰⁷. How to explain the presence of a vase bearing Apopi’s cartouches – not pounded – among Amenhotep I’s funeral viaticum? The fact is all the more surprising that Apopi is believed to have been the sworn enemy of Amenhotep’s grandfather, Tao, of whom he had perhaps caused the death. The full identity of this Herit is unknown and her name has never been found elsewhere. Although she was associated with Apopi on this vessel piece, it is not written that she was his own daughter but simply *s3t-nswt*, “daughter of (a) king”. The

¹⁰⁴ Maspero 1889: 541.

¹⁰⁵ Gitton 1984: 45-48.

¹⁰⁶ Also called Herti because damaged signs on this fragment. Carter 1916: 152 reports this uncertain reading and calls her Herath.

¹⁰⁷ Metropolitan Museum of Art no. 21.7.7. See Carter 1916: Pl. XXI-1; Hayes 1990: 6, Fig. 2.

proximity of the cartouches prompted Carter to link her to Apopi¹⁰⁸, followed later by other scholars. Although Herit is not qualified of *hmt-nswt*, “king’s wife”, would she be the daughter of a Hyksos king given in marriage to a Theban king¹⁰⁹ or to a Theban inheritor? Would she be the female ancestor of the Ahmosid lineage, which Amenhotep I knew that he was the last male representative¹¹⁰? It is unlikely that this supposed alliance could have taken place in the other direction (a Southern princess given to Apopi). First, because the name of Herit does not seem Egyptian; second, because before the Ptolemy there is no example of an Egyptian princess being given as a wife to a foreign king. (See Amenhotep III's reply to the king of Babylon Kallima-Sin, who asked for the hand of an Egyptian princess, that never was the daughter of the king of Egypt given to an alien¹¹¹).

The king who had welcomed Joseph in *Genesis* had not been identified. The one who had not known Joseph will not be further named in *Exodus*. This general lack of chronological elements has led many scholars to argue that *Exodus*' stories were located out of time – i.e. in the legend – and that it was futile to try to link them to history. The king's speech opening the narrative suggests they might be wrong:

He said to his people, “Behold, the people of the children of Yisra’el are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land”.

(Ex 1:9-10)

Here are the Hebrews suddenly badly considered. These verses (as well as the opening 8th verse telling the enthronement of this king) could refer to a dynastic change. The reversal situation that best fits the xenophobic atmosphere described here is the one which saw the advent of the 18th Dynasty and the Hyksos' withdrawal. In the end of the speech, the Hebrew text captures the fear of Pharaoh to see the children of Israel fight against him

¹⁰⁸ Carter 1916: 152

¹⁰⁹ Carter 1916: *op. cit.*; Hayes 1990: 7; Grimal 1988: 250. Indeed, Apopi, who reigned at least 33 years according to the Rhind Papyrus (40+x, according to the Turin P.), was probably the contemporary of four (if not five or six) Theban kings.

¹¹⁰ At his death, Amenhotep I left no male inheritor. His successor, Thutmose I, was not one of his sons but probably one of his sons-in-law.

¹¹¹ EA 4; Moran 1987: 68-70.

wə’ālāh min-hā’āreš. That does not signify “and depart from the land”, as translated by *SQV*, but “and ascend from the land”: *ekseleusontai ek tes ges*, “ascending from the earth”, as translated the *LXX*, i.e. from *inside* Egypt, as the Hyksos did.

So, they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor.

(Ex 1:11a)

If we remember Pharaoh’s words in the above passage, we wonder how the Egyptians could have overwhelmed a people *more and mightier* than them.

And they built storage cities for Pharaoh, Pithom and Ra’amses.

(Ex 1:11b)

The second part of this verse is the source of the hypothesis identifying Ramses II to the oppressor pharaoh, and this on a clue as light as the assertion to the Hebrews of the erection of two cities (three in the *LXX*), one of which being called *Ra’amses*. Although this place name evokes undoubtedly Ramses II and the city of Per-Ramses (*pr-r3msw*, the “House of Ramses”, present Qantir) which this king continued and achieved the building started by his father Sethy I, it is not of Per-Ramses that it is in question here.

In the 19th century CE, it was believed that Per-Ramses was located under the large tell of San el-Hagar because of countless blocks, colossal statues, obelisks, and other artifacts bearing the name of Ramses II found on the site by the first excavators. But one soon noticed that most of the blocks were refaced, so reused. In other words, that the town buried under the tell was not Per-Ramses but another city built from its ruins. It was later recognized as the antique Tanis (*d^{nt}*), the Biblical *šō’an*, capital of subsequent dynasties. It took 30 years of additional researchs to finally find Per-Ramses 20 km to the south. It was then discovered that the town was partly built *on the ruins of Avaris*, the ancient Hyksos capital.

If the builder of the city called Ramses in the *Bible* was the Hebrews’ oppressor, why the Biblical writer would he persist in calling him “Pharaoh”? It would be surprising that in his time, one reminded the name of the city but not of its builder, which was perfectly identical! The narrator knew the malevolent pharaoh he evoked was not called Ramses, but as he did not know his name, he just referred to him by his title, as his predecessor in *Genesis* did about the benefactor of Joseph.

The name *Ramses* is an anachronism. In Gn 47:11, the king who welcomed Joseph had installed Jacob and his sons in a place already called *the land of Ramses*. Yet, nobody, in this context, has thought to identify this benevolent monarch as Ramses II¹¹². There is no reason that it is not the same in *Exodus*. The *city* of Ramses should, therefore, be linked to the *city* of Avaris and the *land* of Ramses (or of Goshen) to the *area* of Avaris, which stretched to the south, from the royal residence to the Wadi Tumilat (c. 20 km.) *You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me*, had said Joseph to his father Jacob¹¹³.

As for the place name of Pithom (*piṭōm*), it is the Hebraization of Per-Atum (*pr-itm*, the “House of Atum”, present Tell el-Retabah and/or Tell el-Maskhuta) towns set along the Wadi Tumilat, from where started a road leading to Tjaru (present Tell Hebua) and to the city that the Greeks will call later Pelousion (present Tell el-Farama). Nothing was discovered there that allows linking Pithom to the alleged oppression of the Hebrews.

The passage mentioning the building of the cities of Pithom and Ramses by the children of Israel could refer to the transformation of Hyksos buildings with the aim of their reuse by Ahmose. The excavations of the Austrian mission directed by Manfred Bietak at the site of Tell el-Dab’a highlighted that after the fall of the Hyksos, Ahmose had disassembled – not demolished – the citadel they had erected at Avaris to rebuild at its location, with the same materials, another Asian type of palace-fortress. A gate of Amenemhet I (12th Dynasty), previously reutilized by the Hyksos, was even reassembled in the defensive wall as an entrance point to the access ramp of the edifice¹¹⁴. According to the general layout of the building, *sans précédent en Égypte*, Bietak writes, *il apparaît que de la main d’œuvre constituée d’Asiatiques a été affectée à cette tâche*¹¹⁵. The Jewish tradition could have kept the memory of these works by assigning them to “the children of Israel”.

¹¹² Of course: that would imply the existence of the city of Ramses at Joseph’s epoch, making impossible its construction by his descendants. The mention of the erection of Heliopolis in the LXX is equally fanciful: Heliopolis already existed under the reign of Djoser, a thousand-years ago, and its foundation is probably even older.

¹¹³ Gn. 45:10.

¹¹⁴ Bietak 1994: 49 and 77, Fig. 16.

¹¹⁵ Bietak 2007, 749.

Furthermore, the M.T. qualifies Pithom and Ramses of ‘*ārê miskānōt*’, “storage cities”, but that of the LXX, older, designates them by the terms *poleis ochyras* “fortress-cities”. This is certainly the exact translation of the initial qualification of these towns: the words “storage cities” seem to come from an ancient confusion between the very similar Hebrew terms ‘*ārê miskānōt*’, “storage cities”, and ‘*ārê misgārōt*’, “defended cities”. Manetho, per Josephus, described also Avaris as a walled and garrisoned city¹¹⁶.

The fortress-palace built by Ahmose with Hyksos materials was later remodeled and enlarged by Thutmose III, before being decommissioned in the second half of the 18th Dynasty¹¹⁷. But the haven of Avaris and its temple of Seth stayed active. Two hundred years later, when Sethy I and Ramses II built Per-Ramses, the new city encompassed the Hyksos’ haven installations and the temple of Seth, god to which the Ramessids devoted themselves. Then, the name of Avaris began to fall into oblivion. Another two hundred years later, Per-Ramses was abandoned because of silting of the Pelusiac branch in favor of Tanis. Given the rarity of long-lasting materials in the Delta and the relative financial poverty of the 21st Dynasty, the Egyptians purely and simply dismantled Per-Ramses (which the remains disappeared under sand and scree) to build Tanis. And four hundred years after the abandonment of Per-Ramses, at the time of the writing of the *Novel of Joseph* and the first stories about the exodus, the single thing one remembered was that in the area where the tradition located the Hebrews’ ancient residence had risen a city containing the name of a glorious past pharaoh: Ramses. Nearly a millennium had passed since the eviction of the Hyksos and the popular memory had forgotten all about them and their capital.

It should also be noted that slavery, as a social-economic system based on the exploitation of people considered as merchandise, subjected to tyrannical power, and maintained in this condition, was unknown in Egypt. In the Nile Valley, the single people that could have been considered as bondsmen were war-prisoners, more rarely convicted criminals, but their living conditions, albeit painful, were identical to those of farmers or construction workers, or even of soldiers when they happened to be incorporated into the army. The oldest biblical passages portray the Hebrews, not as slaves groaning under the yoke, but living in the family among the Egyptians, with a personal dwelling, a piece of

¹¹⁶ *A. Ap.*, I, 14, 78.

¹¹⁷ Bietak 2007, 756.

land, livestock, and own institutions, as would probably live the population subordinate to the Hyksos kings. The passages describing the Hebrews as enslaved are derived, as we have said, from a later tradition. The *Deuteronomy* lends to Moses a speech that draws from the archaic source. He announces to the people:

For the land, where you go in to possess [Canaan], it is not as the land of Mitsrayim, that you came out from, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of herbs...

(Dt 11:10)

In this passage, the Hebrews are not presented as pastors but as farmers. Slavery is not mentioned. Egypt described by this verse is far to be a land of suffering¹¹⁸.

Then, the *Bible* portrays the pharaoh who had not known Joseph as a cruel and stupid tyrant. Determined to prevent the children of Israel to proliferate, he orders to throw to the Nile all the male newborns of the Hebrews. This homicide intention contradicts his primary purpose of making these people work on his building sites. It is another indication of adding to the traditional nucleus. Furthermore, an autocrat who wanted to get rid of an undesirable community would not have instrumented such a ridiculous method. He had a devoted army of which the sword would have been more efficient. This was certainly the execution project of the primitive tradition. It would have survived in Ex 5:21, which speaks of a sword (*ḥereb*) put in king's hand to kill the Hebrews, as well as in the Quran, which replaces the drowning by the throat-slitting¹¹⁹. In fact, the verses describing the king's will to kill (in one way or another) all the male Hebrew newborns have been inserted here to introduce the wonderful story of Moses' exposure opening the next chapter. It is clear that the royal hostility concerns only Moses. After his birth and his exposure on the Nile river bank, the text will never speak again of the elimination of the Hebrew newborns.

The cutesy play of Moses' exposure – three months old baby placed in a “box” (*tēbāh*) daubed with bitumen and pitch (Mesopotamian practice unusual in Egypt, by the way) and abandoned among the plants along the Nile riverbank, where Pharaoh's daughter, came to bathe, found him and immediately adopted him – is implausible.

¹¹⁸ “Watering with the foot” refers to small irrigation channels that still today, the *fellah* opens or closes by moving the ground with the foot.

¹¹⁹ Quran 28: 4.

1. The Egyptian princesses and the high-lineage women were not going to wade along the miry banks of the river to indulge their toilet at the risk of being bitten by a snake or grabbed by a crocodile. They performed their ablutions at home with a lot of hot water and perfumed oils, as complacently shown by the iconography and the discovery of bath or shower cabins in the palace of Ramses III at Medinet Habu¹²⁰.
2. The episode does not take place in Goshen, where the Hebrews had been installed, but close to the royal palace. The box containing the child is laid in a place where Pharaoh’s daughter found it upon her arrival. It is evident that the scribe had not represented the princess performing first 15 km on foot with all her attendants to go bathing, before performing again as much in the opposite direction to return home after toileting (extenuated and good to rewash from head to foot).
3. We must doubt of the historicity of an episode when the author who recounts it uses of stereotypes. The wonderful story of a child exposed to the elements or wild animals (often due to the fear of a king to be dethroned by him), then gathered and raised in secret, and who will access to the highest functions, is a fabulous well attested and widespread theme. It suffices to consider the legend recounting the birth of Sargon of Akkad, in which mirror reflect that of Moses, Cyrus, Perseus, Œdipus, Semiramis, Romulus and Remus, and many other heroes.

But the implausibilities of the narrative do not end:

He [the child] became her son [of the princess]. And she named him Mosheh, and said, “Because I drew him out of the water”.

(Ex 2:10b)

The linking of Moses’ name (*mōšeh*) to *māšāh*, “to draw out”, is an approximation, a late and popular invention. First, *māšāh* is a Hebrew verb and it is difficult to see an Egyptian princess making puns in the Hebrew language. Second, in Biblical Hebrew, “drew out” says itself *māšīṭihū* and not *mōšeh*, which rather means “drawer”. The desire to give to a personal name an etymologic value is found in Sargon’s legend, but in this one, it is the name of the savior of the child, the water drawer Aqqi, which means “drawer”.

¹²⁰ See Hölscher 1941: 54, Pl. 32b.

The fact that it is Pharaoh’s daughter who names Moses led to think that the proper name *mōšeh* was of Egyptian origin. Many scholars see in it the verbal element *msi* (or *msw*), which we have seen that it is linked to the birth. This etymology, commonly presented as an affirmation, is in reality a conjecture. According to this, *mōšeh* would derive from a theophoric Egyptian personal name as *iʿh-msw* (“Born of Iah”), *dhwti-msw* (“Born of Thoth”) or *imn-msw* (“Born of Amun”), from which the divine element was removed, leaving only to subsist *msw*, which would have given the Hebrew *mōšeh*. Surely Moses is not the only person in his legendary family to bear a name apparently derived from Egyptian language: that of his sister Miryam (*miryām*) could come from *mryt-ym* (“Beloved of Yam”¹²¹); the one of his grandson Merari (*mərārī*) sounds like a metathesis of *mry-rʿ* (“Beloved of Ra”); that of his grandnephew Phinehas (*pīnəḥās*) seems to be a Hebraic transcription of *p3-nḥsy* (“the Nubian”¹²²). It is likely that these names (fairly common) still existed in Egypt at a time when the scribe introduced them into Moses’ genealogy. In the present state of our knowledge, the hypothesis of an Egyptian origin of Moses’ name cannot be rejected but must be considered with caution. In the absence of evidence and considering the antiquity of this legendary personage, deeply rooted in the Hebrew memory but not in Egyptian, a Semitic origin of the name should be preferred, even if it is not proven. It might as well be related to the substantive *šēm* (“name”). Mosheh, we note, is quite simply the back-slang of *šəmō* (“his name”), pun introduced in Ex 2:10 in which the hero is named *for the first time* (*wattiqrā šəmō mōšeh*, “and she called his name Moses”).

The context indicates also that the princess does not name the baby at the time of his discovery, but only after his weaning, so, long after his birth¹²³. Before receiving his identity, he is always called the “child” (*yeled*), which implies, either that his biological parents had not yet given him a name at his exposure at the age of three months (what is unthinkable), or that the hero was already called Mosheh in previous legends. Puzzled,

¹²¹ Yam is a Sea deity known by the mythology of Ugarit. At an indeterminated epoch, this Semitic divine name entered in the Egyptian vocabulary under the form *ym(w)* to designate, as in Hebrew, large expanses of water as seas or lakes. The current name of the Fayum Lake comes from its ancient name *p3-ym*, “the lake”.

¹²² And not “the Black” as we often read, which says itself *p3-km*.

¹²³ After that a nurse selected from the Hebrew women (nanny who was – as if by chance – his own mother) suckled him.

the author of Ex 2:10 would have had no alternative than to give to *mōšeh* a phonetic etymology (*šāmō*), before that another one comes to link it to *māšāh*.

Another ancient etymology linked Mosheh to the Egyptian terms, *mw*, “water” and *h_{sy}*, “favorite”, which would have given *mw-h_{sy}*, “favorite of the water”. The fact that this Egyptian expression does not say itself *mw-h_{sy}* but *h_{sy}-mw* is enough to ruin this etymology. Already made at the beginning of the 1st century CE by Philo of Alexandria¹²⁴, then taken up by Josephus¹²⁵, it was only an attempted exegesis of the words placed in the mouth of the princess: *māšīṭihū hammayim*, “drew out of the waters”.

MOSES, UNNEEDED HERO

Although we cannot exclude that Moses was a historical personage, it is very unlikely that it was the artisan of the departure from Egypt. *The oldest versions recounting this event never mention his existence.* The legends about him would have been countless and many have certainly been lost. In *Exodus*, it exists, in the most perfect disorder, two versions of his sojourn in Midian, where his stepfather does not bear the same name: Rehuel (*rā’ū’él*, “Friend of El”) in Ex 2:18; Jethro (*yitrō*, “Superior”) in Ex 3:1. There are also two versions of his encounter with a deity at the foot of a sacred mountain, one in a peaceful context (Ex 3: 2), another in a surprise attack (Ex 4: 24-26); but in a version ignoring his escape to Midian, it is in Egypt that the god appears to him (Ex 6: 28-30). There is also a parallel tradition in which Moses is a such important personage that the Egyptians give him their riches to his request (Ex 3:21; 11: 2-3; 12: 35-36), and another in which, on the contrary, he is just a slave among others (Ex 5: 4). In one version, he has just a sister; in another, he has a sister and a brother... Therefore, what to think about the traditionalist argumentation that holds for truthful the late amalgam of all these fables and establish its computation on the aberrant biographical information of those, making an octogenarian travel *pedibus cum jambis* thousands of kilometers over hill and dale, before sending him to wander in the wilderness until his 120th anniversary, and this at a time when life expectancy was barely 35 years old¹²⁶? Even if Moses had been a real person,

¹²⁴ *De vita Mosis*, I, 17.

¹²⁵ *Antiquities of the Jews*, II, 9, 6.

¹²⁶ Life expectancy calculated on the data given by Winkler – Wilfing 1991: 140.

it is obvious that one has adorned his (completely unknown) biography in the aim to link the departure from Egypt to a name that became prestigious at the time of writing down such fabrications. Trying to identify Moses to a historical personage is more than a challenge. Once rejected fables and glosses about him, remains only the desert wind.

Nevertheless, let us project “40 years” after his adoption by Pharaoh’s daughter.

Now it came about in those days, when Mosheh had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw a Mitsrite beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So, he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Mitsrite and hid him in the sand. [...] When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Mosheh. But Mosheh fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

(Ex 2:11-15)

It is difficult to see the adoptive grandson of the reigning pharaoh, that became an Egyptian dignitary, commit this kind of act. And even though he would have committed this crime, it would be surprising that his “grandfather” sentenced to death his daughter’s adoptive son without a due procedure. As for this princess, it is noteworthy that she has strangely disappeared from the narrative, indicating its belonging to an alternative tradition. In the wonderful stories of a predestined child, it is often a soothsayer’s oracle predicting the throne usurpation by this hero which justifies the king’s animosity towards him and his exposure. Here, as there is no prediction (except in a non biblical legend recorded by Josephus¹²⁷), it is the murder of the Egyptian overseer which is the cause of the royal anger.

To prevent the execution of the death sentence, Moses flees to Midian, in the northwest of Arabia. This episode has an interesting parallel in a well-known Egyptian tale: *The Story of Sinuhe*. This tale starts after the assassination of the first pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty, Amenemhet I. Its main personage is the royal functionary Sinuhe. Returning from a campaign led by Amenemhet’s eldest son, the future Senusret I, Sinuhe becomes aware of a conspiracy that resulted in the assassination of the ruling king. Frightened for an obscure reason, perhaps linked to the regicides’ personality (a secret he should not have known), he flees to Syria. After many adventures, he marries there the daughter of

¹²⁷ *Antiquities of the Jews*, II, 9, 7.

a local chief. Years later, he finally returns to Egypt, where Senusret, who has managed to foil the plot and knows that Sinuhe is innocent, forgives him his desertion. That is basically what will happen to Moses. He flees to Midian, about 300 km southeast of the Delta, stays there “40 years” and conjoins with a local chief’s daughter. As Sinuhe, he goes back to Egypt, but is not welcome: on the contrary, he opposes the king.

The end of v. 15 tells: *Moses fled from the face [SQV: the presence] of Pharaoh, and he sat down [SQV: he settled] in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well*. This repetition of the verb *yāšab*, “to sit down”, that could be interpreted by “to dwell, settle”, indicates the amalgamation of two originally independent versions. The first part seeks to connect the narrative of Moses’ flight to an earlier legend who stood his origin in Midian. Modern translators, embarrassed by the turn of this verse, have interpreted it in their own way, translating *yāšab* by other verbs, thinking so to correct what they took for a superfluity.

In Midian, Moses will show himself a ladies’ man like all mythological heroes. One day the seven daughters of the local sheik named Rehuel, come to the well to water their goats. Shepherds arise. They throw the daughters away in order to leave their own beasts to drink first. Moses, then, intervenes as a gallant righter of wrongs and puts intruders on the run before filling himself these young ladies’ troughs. Returned home, they hasten to tell their father that an “Egyptian” protected them. Rehuel, who wants to know this man sends his daughters to look for him and invites him to dinner. At the end of the repast, he hired this unknown man as a shepherd, and in the wake, offers him his daughter Zipporah in marriage¹²⁸. Likely, she was not very lovely, from where the father’s eagerness to marry her to the first comer: her name, which the fideistic exegesis translates flatteringly by “little bird”, is the feminine form of *šippōr*, (“barnyard bird, poultry”). Moses’ marriage with a rather ugly woman is copied on Jacob’s marriage. For memory, Laban (Jacob’s uncle) had united by ruse his nephew to his eldest daughter, the *‘ênê rakkōt* (“weak-eyed, who suffers from myopia or strabismus”) Leah against seven years of flocks herding, before giving him the youngest, the *yāpāt-tō’ar wīpāt mar’eh* (“Beautiful of shape and beautiful of appearance”) Rachel against other seven working years¹²⁹. Laban’s personage was known by Northern Arab traditions. His name, which means “White”, was

¹²⁸ Ex 2: 16-21.

¹²⁹ Gn 29: 16-30.

one of widespread designations of the Moon god worshiped by the Semitic peoples. It is found in the Levant as a place name in the appellation of Mount Lebanon, and in Midian, in a town bearing that name which Dt 1:1 refers under the appellation of *lābān* (“to be white”), and Nb 33:20-21 under the variant *libnāh* (“to be white”, in the feminine). The Quranic tradition refers also to Laban when it speaks about Moses’ marriage. In the *Quran*, the sheik is not named and has (as Laban) only two girls, and not seven. He proposes to Moses:

Indeed, I wish to wed you one of these, my two daughters, on [the condition] that you serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten, it will be [as a favor] from you.

(Quran 28:27)

Is not known whether the Moses of the Quranic tradition received a second wife for the supernumerary years. The *Quran* is silent on this point, as the *Bible*. However, an exegetical confusion and a parallel legend assign to Moses a second spouse of allegedly Ethiopian nationality. Much has been said about her because of a brief mention of *Numbers* inserted while the Hebrews came out of Egypt for some time, and camped in the desert.

Miryam and Aaron [Moses’ sister and brother] spoke against Mosheh because of the Kushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Kushite woman.

(Nb 12:1)

The following of the narrative, which has no relation to this misalliance (which will be never again mentioned in the *Bible*), indicates that this verse is a gloss. The subject of the recrimination is the foreign origin of Moses’ wife, defined twice by the term *kušīt*, which has misled the authors of the LXX. Indeed, for the Egyptians, *k3š* ou *kš* designated the Upper Nile region, i.e. Nubia. The Greeks having called this region *Aithiops* (“[land of] burnt-faces”, from *aithó*, “to burn”, and *ops*, “face”), the LXX translated logically *kušīt* by *Aithiopisses*, “Ethiopian”.

According to a non biblical legend recorded by Josephus (who draw and probably modify somehow an excerpt of Artapanus), an “Ethiopian” army suddenly just invaded Egypt.

The Egyptians, under this sad oppression, betook themselves to their oracles and prophecies; and when God had given them this counsel, to make use of Moses the Hebrew, and take his assistance: the King commanded his daughter to

produce him, that he might be the General of their army. Upon which, when she had made him swear he would do him no harm, she delivered him to the King and supposed his assistance would be of great advantage to them. She withal reproached the Priest, who when they had before admonished the Egyptians to kill him, were not ashamed now to own their want of his help.

Hereinafter in the story, Moses appears as a so good strategist that he not only succeeds in driving back the “Ethiopians” but goes besieging their own capital.

Tharbis was the daughter of the King of the Ethiopians: she happened to see Moses, as he led the army near to the walls, and fought with great courage: and admiring the subtlety of his undertakings, and believing him to be the author of the Egyptian success, when they had before despaired of recovering their liberty; and to be the occasion of the great danger the Ethiopians were in, when they had before boasted of their great achievements, she fell deeply in love with him: and upon the prevalency of that passion, sent to him the most faithful of all her servants to discourse with him upon their marriage. He thereupon accepted the offer, on condition she would procure the delivering up of the city; and gave her the assurance of an oath to take her to his wife: and that when he had once taken possession of the city he would not break his oath to her. No sooner was the agreement made, but it took effect immediately: and when Moses had cut off the Ethiopians, he gave thanks to God, and consummated his marriage, and led the Egyptians back to their own land.

(Antiq., II, 10, 241-253)

The delivery of a town or a region by a native woman (often the local king’s daughter) who falls in love with the assailant reports to the myth of Tarpeia. Tarpeia was the daughter of Spurius Tarpeius who commanded the Capitol at the time when the Romans were at war with the Sabines. She fell in love with their king Tatius and delivered the fortress to the Sabines¹³⁰. Other examples: the history of Nanis (king Croesus’ daughter) delivering the city of Ephesus to Cyrus in exchange for marriage, that of Scylla (king Nisos’ daughter) became enamored of the conqueror Minos, that of Medea (king Aeetes’ daughter) in love with Jason and helping him acquiring the Golden Fleece, or that of Ariadne (king Minos’ daughter) helping Theseus to escape from the Labyrinth. It is in these legends that the union of Tharbis and Moses is reflected. Josephus has just

¹³⁰ Sanders 1903: 1-47.

transcribed a story from mythology but changed its end in a happier way. Moses concludes this marriage, while in most such stories, the hero breaks his promise and abandons unashamedly the amorous to her fate.

The Ethiopian origin of Moses’ wife comes from the following confusion: if *kš* (Kush) designated the Upper Nubia for the Egyptians, it did not apply for the Hebrews, but probably the author of the gloss introduced in *Numbers* had forgotten it. In the list of the peoples given in Gn 10, *kuš* is the name of Noah’s grandson. According to Gn 10:7, Kush became the father of Seba, Ḥavilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabtekha and Nimrod. The name of *səḥā* refers to the South Arabian kingdom of Sheba, centered around the oasis of Marib (present Yemen) which the legendary queen visited King Solomon; *ḥāwīlāh* designates an Arabic place name: a personage bearing the same name is given to be the son of the Arab patriarch Yokshān in Gn 10:29-30; *sabṭāh*, *ra‘māh* and *sabṭākā* would be also¹³¹. Just *nimrōd* is problematic: this name seems to refer to the city of Nimrud (also known as Kalkhu), the capital of Assyria from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) to that of Shalmaneser V (727-722 BCE), but it could also hide the name of an unknown Arabic place. Anyway, except *nimrōd*, perhaps lost in the list, all descendants of Kush are linked to Arabia, not to Africa.

But there is more: in Josephus’ account of the military and romantic exploits of Moses, the capital of the “Ethiopia” is called Saba, written in the form Σαβαν, which can be found several times in the LXX, where this place name undoubtedly designates the kingdom of Arabia. Josephus, probably taken aback by this homophony, adds that the Persian king Cambyses II would have later renamed this city “Meroe” after the name of his sister. That is false: the city of Meroe was already so called long before the time of Cambyses¹³². What Josephus ignored, having never been in Ethiopia, was the undeniable influence that the Arabic culture of the kingdom of Saba had practiced on the Ethiopian civilization of the kingdom of Damaat from the 7th to the 5th century BCE.

Finally, in the third chapter of the *Book of Habakkuk*, Kush, under the form *kūšān*, is formally identified to the land of Midian:

¹³¹ Rachet, 2003, 302.

¹³² Josephus held this information from Strabo (*Geogr.* XVII, 1, 5), who drew it from other authors. But long before, Herodotus makes no mention of this detail: in *Inq.* II, 29, he talks about Meroe without letting suspect that it was a new name.

I saw the tents of Kushan in vain exertion. The dwellings of the land of Midian trembled.

(Ha 3:7)

The French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem concedes that Kushan appears as an archaic designation of Midian¹³³. Over the time, Kushan = Midian was probably forgotten and confused with Kush = Nubia.

If the biblical scribes had given an Ethiopian wife to Moses, they would have talked again about this woman later – which was not the case – and, above all, they would not have failed to give an offspring to this union – which was not the case either. In reality, Moses’ *kušīt* wife is none other than the Midianite Zipporah. The personal name of Θάρβις worn by the princess in the legend looks like an anagram of *šippōrāh* and a Hellenization of Tarpeia.

Miriam’s and Aaron’s recrimination occurs while Zipporah, remaining in Midian in this version, had just joined the Hebrews in the desert. This reproach stigmatizes the grievous derogation from the endogamous marriage rule that had been Moses’ union with a foreign woman.

This woman will give two sons to Moses: Gershom (from *ġēr*, “sojourner, foreigner, immigrant”) and Eleazar, “Rescue of El”.

THEN YAHWEH APPEARED

“Forty years” passed anew, during which Moses, became a shepherd, has nothing to do but keep his stepfather’s flocks. One day, while he is on the fringe of the desert letting the goats graze, he arrives near the foot of a mountain, in a place called *horeb*. One often links this place, frequently transcribed “Horeb”¹³⁴, to the adjective *hārāb*, “to be dry, desiccated, parched” but its verbal form also means “to attack, fight” (found again in *hereb*, “sword”). This mountain was certainly one of those innumerable sacred heights on

¹³³ BJ 1998: 1631, f; Gerard 1989: 1920.

¹³⁴ This transcription is due to a misreading of the *h*, which shall be pronounced *kh*. See Χωρηβ (Khoreb) in the LXX.

which the Storm-gods were supposed to manifest their presence by a rumble, either in the context of thunderstorm and lightning or in that – even more spectacular – of volcanism.

This place is often associated with the Mount Sinai, current Jebel Musa, one of the highest points of the mountainous peninsula located east of Egypt. Yet, Biblical Sinai is always described as a high mountain, whereas Horeb seems rather be an area situated at the foot of a mountain (also called *har hā’ēlōhīm*, “mountain of Elohim”). This connection comes from the ambiguity of the received text. As there was no Jewish tradition specifying the exact location of this sacred place, the early Christians did not cease searching to find it. A legend tells that the identification of the Biblical Horeb/Sinai to the present Jebel Musa was revealed to the Roman Emperor Constantine I (306-337) by a visionary. However, we know that the earlier persecutions had already led many fugitives Christians in the peninsula. They are probably responsible for this geographical positioning. Two centuries later, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527-565 CE) endorsed the confusion by building a fortified monastery on the slopes of the current Mount Saint Catherine, nearby the Mount Sinai.

Jebel Musa is located about 150 km west of Midian as the crow flies but nearly the double by road. Even in the legend, no shepherd would have moved his flock over such a distance to bring his beasts in a place where they would not have found enough to graze and even less to drink. In contrast, in north-western Arabia, where Midian was located, there is a chain of volcanoes (now extinct) to either of which it would be more logical to link the Horeb site. One of them, the Jebel Hārb perhaps even keeps in its present name the former name of Horeb. In Arabic *hārb* means “war”. This significance is the same than Hebrew *horeb*. From the Jebel Hārb to the Hala al-Badr, another ancient volcano of the Hejaz, popular traditions on Moses and his father-in-law abound. Local modern guides show you one or other well, now dried, where Shu‘ayb’s daughters watered their goats¹³⁵. (In truth, they show you so many different “wells” that one ends up believing that this man had raised a whole girls’ boarding school.) The plain situated below this ancient volcanic chain is rather inhospitable in the dry season, but when the monsoon arrives, it allows grazing goats and semi-wild dromedaries. There remain traces all over of worship, some dating back to the Neolithic times: standing stones, cairns, rock carvings, ruined chapels...

¹³⁵ Shu‘ayb is the name given by the *Quran* to Rehuel/Jethro.

At the foot of the mountain, a strange sight is suddenly offered to the eyes of Moses:

The messenger of Yahweh appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

(Ex 3:2)

In these semi-arid regions where the temperature often reaches 50° C in the sun, the spontaneous burning of a variety of small bushes of *fraxinella* species is still not exceptional. In fact, it is an aromatic essence distilled by the oleiferous substance produced by the plant that ignites for a few seconds, leaving the organism intact. Since immemorial time, this sudden and ephemeral flamboyance, inexplicable by an observer unable to issue a scientific theory about it, was taken as a godly manifestation. Today, it still occurs in some parts of North Africa and Arabia, and many of the natives believe it caused by the passage of a jinn.

So Mosheh said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up”. When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, Elohim called to him from the midst of the bush [...]

(Ex 3:3-4)

It is first a “messenger” (*mal’ak*) which manifests itself in the burning bush. Then “Yahweh” sees Moses heading to the bush, but it is “Elohim” who calls him within the flames. Here, the different transcribers simply introduced each a gloss giving to this god their own divine designation. The appearance of the avatar of the god (the Hebrew *mal’ak*, the *aggelos* of the Greek text) is a lineament of the primitive theophany; the references to Yahweh and Elohim (distinct appellations of Judean and Israelite traditions) were added over the rewrites of the episode. The initial (and logical) version of the narrative told probably that Moses, who saw a bush on fire, approaches, puzzled that the plant burns without being consumed.

Then a divine entity is revealed to him.

Up to now, the deities associated with the biblical god had always expressed themselves *ex abrupto* without any mention of a particular appearance. Their presence was generally summed up by the arrival of a seemingly ordinary man, or by a dream, or by a speech come from the ether without preamble and that only the hero seemed to hear. At Horeb, by cons, occurs a so unusual theophany, that a fourth transcriber will feel obliged to place it in the sphere of intelligence of late Judaism by making clear by the god:

“I am the Elohim of your father, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob.”

(Ex 3:6)

The identification of this entity to the god of the patriarchs is a forgery. Moses, who is believed to have been raised by Egyptians since the age of three months, does not know his father, and still less Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the same if he has a Midianite origin. The original legend recounted undoubtedly a meeting with an unknown god. That is why Moses will ask his name. To this question, he will receive the dilatory response: *'ehyeh 'āšer 'ehyeh*, generally translated by “I am who I am”. This repetition of the first person singular of the imperfective (unfinished) form of the verb *hāyāh*, “to exist, to be”, regardless of the translation that one gives to it, is a “boilerplate” turn common in Biblical Hebrew (“I love who I love”, “I go where I go”, “He did to him what he did to him”¹³⁶). Much has been embroidered around this formula: the fideistic exegesis sees in this turn the “subliminal” message that it is not for man to know the nature of God. In truth, it denounces that its author had simply become unable to give a clear etymology of the name of his god. Maybe he does not want to admit that his god was originally a foreign god, a native mountain deity of the adjoined regions of Edom and Midian, as told in Dt 33: 2 (*Yahweh came from Sinai, and rose from Seir [...] He shone forth from Mount Paran*) and in the *Canticle of Debora* in Jg 5:4 (*Yahweh, when You went forth out of Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom*).

An inscription of the Temple of Amun at Soleb (Nubia), built by Amenhotep III (1387-1348), would seem, at first sight, to support the existence in the 14th century BCE of a worship of a god named Yahu (another form of Yahweh’s name) in an area located east of the Sinai Peninsula, bordering Arabia and Edom. At the base of the columns of this temple, captives are represented with their arms tied behind the back. Their identification and ethnical characteristics are clearly detailed. One of them is named *t3 š3sw yhw*, which could mean “nomads of Yahu [’s country]”¹³⁷. This interpretation does not have unanimous support: some see *yhw*, not as a theonym but as an unidentified toponymical designation¹³⁸. Indeed, we know another list of the time of Ramses II on which are

¹³⁶ It also existed in Egyptian: the god Amun was “He who does exist that exists”.

¹³⁷ Givon 1971: 26-27.

¹³⁸ Redford 1987: 151.

mentioned *š3sw rbn*, a name that should probably be connected to the Midianite city called Laban from the nickname of the Syrian Moon god¹³⁹. The conversion of a theonym in a toponym designating the territory over which extend the powers of the concerned god is well attested. The best example is that of *aššur* which concerned first a northern Mesopotamian god, became the name of the city which was the capital of Assyria until the early 9th century BCE (which the god Ashshur was initially the poliad deity) and ended up by being extended to the whole Assyrian territory.

The new god immediately invests Moses of the mission to deliver Israel from the yoke of the Egyptians and reiterates the promises repeatedly made before to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about a land flowing with milk and honey, of an innumerable posterity and so on. But as the patriarchs of *Genesis* believed in the divine promises (in fact, contracts like “Do this and I will do that”) and obeyed at the first injunction, Moses procrastinates, biases, and ultimately relies on difficulties to speak (never reported before and which will not be later) in an attempt to evade the mission:

“I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am heavy of mouth [SQV: of speech] and heavy of tongue.”

(Ex 4:10)

This image of a lesser eloquent shepherd is the antithesis of a Moses raised in the court of Pharaoh and educated in Egyptian’s science. One might consider this unflattering portrayal as an authentic shred of his original biography but it is not. This image of a Moses “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” (*kəḥad peh ūkəḥad lāšōn*) is intended only to introduce a new figure through a suggestion of Yahweh.

THE INVENTION OF AARON

And the anger of Yahweh burned against Mosheh, and He said, “Is there not your brother Aharon the Levite? I know that he speaks with good speech. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be

¹³⁹ This is the West-Amarah list, engraved by Ramses II but obviously derived from that of Soleb because it no longer reflects the geopolitical reality of Ramses’ time according to Givon 1971: 76.

glad in his heart. You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth [...] he shall speak for you [...] and he will be as a mouth for you.”

(Ex 4:14-16)

Like Moses, this “Aaron the Levite” suddenly arrived in the family and in the tale, is an “added” character. He does not appear in any of the previous episodes. In the story of Moses’ birth¹⁴⁰, there is mention of a father, a mother and a sister (not named – they will be later) but never of a brother. This is a priestly incision largely posterior which designates Aaron as the elder brother of Moses through a fictitious genealogy inserted four chapters below¹⁴¹. According to the Biblical School of Jerusalem, Aaron was inserted fairly late in Moses’ genealogy¹⁴². The interpolation of this character is revealed in the awkwardness of the scribe. Why does he specify “the Levite” (*hallévi*) speaking of Aaron? Moses being himself a Levite, if Aaron had been his brother, this belonging was obvious, making this precision superfluous? One might object that, if Moses was an Egyptian by adoption (or a Midianite), this precision was necessary. In such a case, it is noteworthy that Moses does not show any surprise in discovering that he has a Hebrew brother. We also wonder why Yahweh did not send directly this so eloquent Aaron to Pharaoh rather than Moses, who will now need an intermediary to talk. And we also do not know how Aaron (supposed to come meet Moses on the road) will be able to recognize this brother that he has theoretically not seen for eighty years, while himself was only three years old and as Moses was still a baby aged of three months... These inconsistencies sufficiently demonstrate the amalgam of disparate traditions.

Yahweh having then announced to Moses the death of the king who had condemned him to death, it does not take more for our hero to go back to the fold and surrender his “departure notice” to his stepfather. After having bid farewell to his in-laws, he hoists wife, children, and impediment on a donkey, and resumed in reverse the way which had led him from Egypt forty years ago.

¹⁴⁰ Ex 2:1-4.

¹⁴¹ Ex 6:14-27.

¹⁴² BJ 1998: 111, b.

THE DEATH OF THE OPPRESSIVE PHARAOH AND THE “MERENPTAH HYPOTHESIS”

The death of the pharaoh inserted at this stage of the suggests that Moses was a contemporary of two pharaohs. This deduction implies the acceptance of the extraordinary longevity of the hero, then 80 years old, but the crux of the matter is not there. In reality, the death of the pharaoh is an invention intended to connect the narrative in which we are with another version of the tradition which featured Moses in Egypt opposing Pharaoh¹⁴³. The compiler realized that the only way to connect the two stories was to bring back his hero in Egypt. But given the reason of Moses' presence in Midian (murder of the Egyptian warder), he had to find a way to avoid the imposed death sentence to be executed. He believed then that it was enough that the king who had pronounced it had disappeared, leaving the believe that his successor was not aware of the condemnation. It was not very realistic but it was enough, two thousand five hundred years later, to create in the minds of historians of modern times the idea that Merenptah was the pharaoh of the *Exodus*.

This hypothesis is attributed to Karl Lepsius (end of our 19th century). At that time, the intangibility of the biblical text had already been largely undermined but the religious conditioning was nevertheless still quite marked. Most of the “orientalists” and all biblical scholars, before entering the University (or the Seminar), had gained experience on Christian institutions benches, considered in those days as the more qualified to give teaching of the years of Greek-Latin learning preceding the study of ancient civilizations. One must also recognize that biblical and historical data while in possession of researchers seemed accord. The hypothesis of the descent of the Hebrews in Egypt at the time of the Hyksos was already accepted. A period of 430 years after that time sent the scholars to the heart of the 19th Dynasty. In this lineage, had lived a king, Ramses II, whose reign was sufficiently long (67 years) to be able to contain most of the first 80 years of Moses' life. Furthermore, the Bible seemed to designate that king as the oppressor of the Hebrews because it mentioned a city named Ramses built by this enslaved people. At the death of Ramses, his successor was his thirteenth son Merenptah. It had to be him the pharaoh of the *Exodus*. Other criteria later brandished like a peremptory argument: Merenptah's corpse had not been found, neither in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings,

¹⁴³ We already find this announcement of the death of the king two chapters above, but it is an even later gloss, as indicated by BJ 1989: 107, g.

nor in the Deir el-Bahari royal cache (discovered in 1881), bringing to induce that he was well and truly drowned in the sea and that his corpse was lost forever.

It was almost at the same time (1896) that William Flinders Petrie discovered a stela on which Merenptah boasted of having destroyed a people whose name was read *Israel*. So, the proponents of the hypothesis exulted. We finally knew the pharaoh of the Exodus!

In 1898, two years after the discovery of the so-called Stela of Israel, the mummy of Merenptah was found almost intact by Victor Loret in a hiding place of Amenhotep II's tomb with eight other royal mummies. The body was soon “unwrapped” and carefully examined. One found no trace of drowning but many traumas caused probably *post-mortem* by violators of the initial burial of the king or by the priests in charge of restoring the profaned mummy.

The “Merenptah hypothesis” has still some supporters today but becomes less and less considered by modern Egyptology. We will also see further that the death of the oppressor pharaoh by drowning is only a belief.

MOSES VERSUS PHARAOH

Let us return to Moses on the way to Egypt. He ends up by meeting Aaron, that Yahweh had sent to him. After the customary accolades, the “brothers” resume their journey and soon, with no further ado, appear before Pharaoh. The scribe imagines that it was enough to the first comer to push the gate of the royal palace and go to the throne room shouting “Here we are” to receive straightway audience of the most powerful man in the world...

Moses and Aaron then tell the king the apparition of Yahweh and, in the process, request the permission to leave Egypt with all the Hebrew people wishing to offer sacrifices to this god in the desert. Pharaoh, of course, reject the request and it is in the terms of his refusal which lies the proof of the existence of the rarely mentioned tradition of a Moses bricklayer slave among his brothers:

But the king of Mitsrayim said to them, “Mosheh and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!”

(Ex 5, 4)

How to understand this order given to Moses to return working up immediately, while he is supposed to come back from Midian after forty years of absence? Mostly, as an

adoptive child of an Egyptian princess, he has never been subjected to forced labor. Is he not described, forty years earlier, wandering as he pleases on sites where were struggling the sons of Israel¹⁴⁴? In fact, this amazing order – noted in M.T.: *ləḳū ləsiḅlōtēḳem*, “go to your burdens”, and in the LXX: *Apélthate hékastos humōn pròs tà érga autoũ*, “Each of you goes back to your works”, indicates that the source of the story has changed. In this version, (from a logically parallel oldest tradition, unfortunately not preserved), the discussion with the king takes place in a context where Moses is a Hebrew like any others required to produce bricks¹⁴⁵. He has not been exposed on the Nile, has not been adopted by a princess and has never left Egypt. We are simply back forty years ago. We are not in the presence of a new pharaoh but still in front of the oppressor king who had not known Joseph. And if he does not mention Moses’ murder for which he had pronounced a death sentence, nor Moses’ escape, it is for the simple reason that, in the version to which Ex 5: 4 refers, these events did not take place. This tradition also contained an appearance of the god but it took place in Egypt, in a banal context, and not at the foot of a mountain in a burning bush:

Now it came about on the day when Yahweh spoke to Mosheh in the land of Mitsrayim, that Yahweh spoke to Mosheh, saying: “I am Yahweh; speak to Pharaoh king of Mitsrayim all that I speak to you”.

(Ex 6, 28-29)

It is noteworthy that here, Yahweh reveals his name without beating about the bush.

For the reader who could be surprised that so many redactional layers may still exist in a story that seems (at first) to develop itself in a harmonious way, here follow some examples that a simple philological analysis of the received text highlights. Three layers can already be discerned in the names of the Egyptian monarch sometimes named *Pharaoh*, sometimes *the king of Egypt* and sometimes *Pharaoh king of Egypt*. The same goes for the multiple designations of the divinity, in which we discern the pen of different writers: *angel of Elohim, Yahweh, Elohim, the God of thy father, the God of the Hebrews, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I am who I am*. Ditto the various names which were given to the Hebrews: *the people, my people, the people of Israel, the children of Israel, Israel*. The deity appears to Moses in Ex 3:5, 10, 13, 16, but in 3:18 it is to Moses

¹⁴⁴ Ex 2:11.

¹⁴⁵ Otherwise this injunction would remain inexplicable.

and the elders of Israel. Moses is sent to speak to *Pharaoh* in Ex 3:10; to *the children of Israel* in 3:13; to *the elders of Israel* in 3:16. Sometimes it is Moses alone that is responsible for speaking to Pharaoh, sometimes it is Moses and the elders, and sometimes it is Moses and Aaron.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

As the meeting with Pharaoh was negative, Moses and Aaron have no alternative but to go to complain to their new god. This then reveals to them his Machiavellian plan: the successive scourges that he will strike Egypt with. As said above, it is recognized that the famous episode of the ten plagues of Egypt belongs to the myth of the destructive bane ongoing by a god because of the behavior of a person or a people. This collective punishment always stages, in a story of hyperbolic character, natural elements or an epidemic. In general, the king of the country hit by the plague consults the gods, who require either a sacrifice or a banishment to lift the sanction. Thus, in Greek mythology, the Cretan king Idomeneo, who sacrificed his son to Poseidon as not to perish drowned, has, by this crime, attracted pestilence on his kingdom. Idomeneo is then exiled on the request of the gods and the epidemic ceases. In the legend of Œdipus, the pestilence blights the Greek city of Thebes. The Delphic oracle declares that the epidemic is due to the presence *intra muros* of a criminal who irritates the god Apollo. In fact, the culprit is none other than the king Œdipus himself, author of parricide and incest to have ignorantly killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta. Œdipus is then driven out of the city to stop Apollo's anger. In the prime example of this myth, Enlil, the supreme god of the Sumerian pantheon, irritated by the behavior of the human kind, first launches a series of “plagues” upon the earth (drought, famine, epidemics) before sending the hyperbolic flood constituted by the Deluge. This mytheme was taken and adapted by the Biblical scribes, before being introduced in *Exodus*, where it is Yahweh who sends the plagues because of the actions of the Egyptians against the sons of Israel. The Hebrews will finally be “released” and misfortune will cease to fall on Pharaoh and his people.

The biblical episode of the ten plagues comes from the amalgam of several traditions formerly independent merged in two main stories. They are still present in the current text in which they were nested in a rather clumsy way.

The oldest narrative presented the exodus as a banishment. It contained only one plague (the present tenth): the death of the firstborns, described as a *nəḡa* ‘, “infection”. This wound touched not only the Egyptian people but also the king whose eldest son was not spared.

Now it came about at midnight that Yahweh struck all the firstborn in the land of Mitsrayim, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Mitsrites, and there was a great cry, for there was no home where there was not someone dead.

(Ex 12:29-30)

In mythology, this type of scourge came from the misunderstanding of the Ancients face of childhood diseases: unable to conceive that an evil could annihilate the children without affecting adults, they saw it as a divine punishment. Here, in *Exodus*, it probably comes out of a more macabre ritual practice: the consecration to Yahweh of “that opens the womb”, i.e. the burnt offering of the firstborns of man and animals¹⁴⁶. According to Ex 13:11-15, the massacre of the Egyptian firstborns would be at the origin of children sacrifices practiced in Israel and Judah:

Now when Yahweh brings you to the land of the Kena'anite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, you shall devote to Yahweh all that opens the womb, and that which opens the womb of every beast that you own; the males belong to Yahweh. [...] And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, “What is this?” then you shall say to him, “With a powerful hand Yahweh brought us out of Mitsrayim, from the house of slavery. It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahweh killed every firstborn in the land of Mitsrayim, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast.”

(Ex 13:11-15)

One does not understand why the Hebrews should later sacrifice their own children on the pretext that Yahweh had once killed those of the Egyptians. It is possible that the tenth

¹⁴⁶ In ancient Levantine cultures, there existed what Mircea Eliade calls *an economy of the Sacred* willing that everything that had belonged to the deity should return to it in part. The offering of the blood of the young martyr was supposed, either to appease the god's wrath, or to regenerate with young blood his vitality that one imagined weakened by the effort to ensure the smooth running of the universe.

plague was the redesign of a lost tradition in which the Hebrews sacrificed their own firstborns to their god in order for him to do forth the people out of Egypt¹⁴⁷.

This opinion is based on the contents of Ex 12:3-13:

On the tenth of this new moon, they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. [...] Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. [...] For I will go through the land of Mitsrayim on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Mitsrayim, both man and beast [...] The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Mitsrayim.

This theme of blood around the doors does not correspond with the tradition that the Hebrews had been confined in Goshen. Otherwise, why should they have marked their houses since only they live in the area? In addition, some previous chapters have presented them enslaved and one can hardly imagine slaves owning houses and livestock. The people described here lives in freedom among the Egyptians. This episode, therefore, refers to the oldest tradition. The scribe simply transcribed an immemorial nomadic custom celebrated at the night of the first full moon of spring, which was to brush the poles of the tent with the sacrificial blood of a lamb or a goat to protect the herds of evil spirits haunting the desert stretches. In the primitive tradition, the blood around doors was surely this of the slain child, believed to serve as a benchmark for the exterminating entity so that he does not enter the house accomplish his sinister work on the following younger¹⁴⁸.

This primitive source yet reflects in the opening verse of Ex 13, in which a few hours before the exodus from Egypt, Yahweh commands Moses:

¹⁴⁷ BJ 1989: 120, b; Bordreuil — Briquel-Chatonnet 2000: 105; Quesnel — Gruson 2000: 138; Frazer 1983: 124-125.

¹⁴⁸ BJ 1989: 120, b; Bordreuil — Briquel-Chatonnet 2000: 105; Frazer 1983: 124-125.

“Set apart to Me every firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Yisra'el, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me. [...] On this day in the new moon of the spring [SQV: of aviv¹⁴⁹], you are about to go forth.”

(Ex 13:2, 4)

The most recent narrative describes the exodus, not as a banishment, but as a nocturnal flight. As often, the new text did not replace its elder but was placed before. The plagues, nine in numbers, are *mōp̄tay*, “wonders”. They do not affect the pharaoh himself, but more the Egyptian people.

A third story, even later and which was discussed above, depicts Abraham and Pharaoh during an alleged sojourn of the patriarch in Egypt. In this narrative, the plagues (not described) are again *nāḡā'im*, “infections”, but only the king is struck, not his people.

According to the versions, the wounds affect: 1) the king and his people; 2) only the people; 3) only the king.

The *Quran* repeats some of these calamities but mentions others absent from the biblical narrative, such as “famine” and “flood”¹⁵⁰. Knowing that the *Quran* is partly derived from alternative traditions that we have not received, we cannot exclude – and it would seem more logical – that another folk tale had given the plagues twelve in number: one per tribe.

The plagues presented as the first nine describe natural events, serious but not unusual in Egypt or in the Levant: the water of the river tinted red, the proliferation of frogs, mosquitoes and horseflies, an epidemic affecting cattle, another disease affecting humans, hail, locusts and darkness by clouds. The water of the Nile changed in blood is often connected with the waves of the river when it transported reddish lands extracted by rains from the banks of the high Nile, but the image could be as well of Levantine origin: we find the same phenomenon in Lebanon, on the Nahr Ibrahim. This river, whose name means “Abraham’s River” was called in ancient times “Adonis’ River”. In Greek mythology, Adonis, Aphrodite’s mortal lover, was killed by a boar. According to a local version of the myth, his blood would have flowed into the river, which explained at the time the reddish tint that its waters take in early spring. (In truth, they owe this ephemeral

¹⁴⁹ *’ābīb* (“young ears”): period of germination of barley; it corresponds to the month of *Nissan*, the first month of the Jewish calendar.

¹⁵⁰ Quran 7: 130, 133.

color to the sediments they carry on that occasion, as was that of the Nile before the building of the Aswan Dam.) The Islamic popular piety renamed this watercourse “Abraham’s River” by assigning its spring redness to the blood of the ram slaughtered by Abraham instead of his son Ishmael. Some plagues raise interesting paradoxes: the fifth, the death of Egyptian livestock, tells us that the Hebrews, yet presented as bricklayer slaves, have livestock, which of course is spared; the tenth, the death of the firstborns, kills again the firstborns of Egyptian livestock¹⁵¹, already killed by an epidemic five wounds before, supporting its belonging to an originally independent tradition.

It is noteworthy that the parallel tradition showing Moses so highly regarded by Pharaoh’s people that they give him their riches to his request just before the departure of the Hebrews ignores the plagues: one cannot imagine Moses still be very popular in the Nile Valley after having afflicted indigenous and king of all conceivable calamities, before killing their firstborns... Other plagues should also be unknown to the older version of the “passage of the sea” that depicts Pharaoh rushing in pursuit of the Hebrews at the head of his chariotry: in that context, we wonder where the king would have found the one thousand two hundred horses needed to pull his six hundred chariots if all his equine herd had been wiped out by the fifth and the tenth plagues...

Although these successive calamities are mostly mythical, some of them could be related to epiphenomena of the Minoan eruption. In Egyptology, the leading advocate of this hypothesis is Claude Vandersleyen but his will to link *all* biblical plagues removes a part of credibility to his assumptions.

The tradition of the banishment of the Hebrews and that of their escape are irreconcilable if they concern the same group of people¹⁵². In the context of inevitable reactionary excesses concomitant to the Hyksos’ withdrawal, some of the ordinary Asiatic people (herdsmen, workers, sailors, craftsmen, merchants...), though inoffensive, could have received the order to clear out of Lower Egypt territories they occupied, probably squatting former official buildings and abandoned temples. Some would have become frightened and would obey, while others, having no other place to go, would have stayed, ignoring that they would get for a time the object of the hostility of a power that had done them no harm until then. The first ones would have widespread in Canaan the version of

¹⁵¹ The plague of the death of the firstborns affected both humans and animals.

¹⁵² BJ 1998: 118, b; Lebeau 1998: 48.

their expulsion, while the seconds would have retained later a more subjective interpretation.

THE “THERA HYPOTHESIS”

Thera was the ancient name of a small archipelago of five islands located in the Mediterranean Sea, about 100 km north of Crete (current Santorini archipelago). It was also the name of its capital. Originally, it was a unique island largely made up of a volcano active for at least 650,000 years. A cataclysmic eruption of this volcano would have occurred c. 1600 BCE. During a previous eruption, the volcano literally exploded, before collapsing on itself, allowing the sea invade its huge crater. There remained only fragments of the prehistoric island scattered around a circular depression (caldera) of 8 km in diameter marking the location of the base of the ancient volcanic cone. During the Minoan eruption, the ejecta would have filled the caldera, but the magma chamber being emptied, the bottom of the caldera would have fallen down under the weight of debris and the water would be engulfed in the chimneys of the volcano, generating a gigantic explosion and creating a tsunami of which the coasts of Crete, Turkey, and Levant have retained the imprint. The Egyptian coast, yet distant about 750 km, must have been affected too, but to a lesser extent because only a few traces have been discovered. No bodies nor valuables were discovered under the ashes and pumice of Thera, indicating that warning signs of the disaster had enabled the inhabitants to flee by sea. The last eruption of this volcano took place in 1956 CE. It was of lesser importance but many indications show that the giant is only asleep under the sea.

On the main island, stands the modern city of Akrotiri, in part built on the site of ancient Thera. The ¹⁴C analysis of the remains of some olive tree branches which were buried alive and recovered by the pumice situates the explosion between 1627 and 1600 BCE¹⁵³. According to Loïc Mangin, deputy editor of the magazine *Pour la Science*, another ¹⁴C dating, made from materials extracted from the ruins of ancient Thera, situates it between 1660 and 1613 BCE. A date obtained by analysis of Greenland ice sheet carrots indicates a significant pollution of sulfur dioxide between 1660 and 1620 BCE. Finally, a dating by dendrochronology fixed the eruption between 1613 ± 13 years BCE, that seems to

¹⁵³ Friedrich et al. 2006; Ritner – Moeller 2014: 14-15.

confirm an analysis of a variety of Californian pine that reveals a cold episode attributed to the presence of volcanic dust in the upper atmosphere around 1626 BCE¹⁵⁴.

The eruption of Thera left marks in the collective memory of the Aegean and Levantine populations, and perhaps also in Egypt, where floated pumice from the volcano have been found in many parts of the Delta. One cannot rule out that one or another detail of the biblical account of *Exodus* could have been linked to the souvenir of some meteors that the eruption had caused in its time. The recall of these unusual phenomena could have been preserved in memory and introduced later in the story of the flight, transformed into Yahweh’s wonders. Thus, the plague of darkness could represent the memory of the ash cloud that the eruption pushed out¹⁵⁵. Similarly, in Ex 9:23, *the voice* [of the thunder = Yahweh’s voice] *accompanied by hail mixed with fire* [burning ashes?]. Ditto the pillar of cloud supposedly guiding the runaways: given the importance of the eruption, it had to be at least 30 km high and visible from the Nile Delta despite the curvature of the Earth. Ditto again the pillar of fire illuminating the night that we can also connect to the first days of the eruption and to the noctilucent clouds (located at an altitude of about 100 km, but that an optical illusion spot on the horizon) consecutive to the most important volcanic eruptions¹⁵⁶.

An Egyptian document, the Rhind Papyrus, written in the year 33 of the Hyksos Ausera Apopi, bears on its back an inscription mentioning a *year 11* that can only belong to the reign of the successor of Apopi, Khamudy, the last Hyksos pharaoh. It cannot be the reign of Ahmose for it is written that, in the year 11 (i.e. of the king reigning officially), *the first month of Akhet, the 23rd day, one has heard* that the fortified town of Tjaru was attacked by *this of the South* (who can only be the Theban ruler of the time, Ahmose¹⁵⁷). This mention also tells that in the same year 11, the god Seth has given “voice” in the

¹⁵⁴ *Pour la Science* 344, June 2006. But one suspects Vesuvius, which experienced an eruption at the same time, to be the source of pollution of sulfur dioxide, and Mount St. Helens to be at the origin of the anomaly found on the California pines.

¹⁵⁵ The explosion of Thera was higher than that of the Indonesian volcano Krakatoa in 1883. Yet this last propelled ashes to an altitude of 27 km, some of which fell to 5,000 km away.

¹⁵⁶ The noctilucent clouds resulting from the Krakatoa eruption were visible during nearly three years.

¹⁵⁷ If it had been the year 11 of Ahmose, the editor would not have used the words “one has heard” and would not have qualified his king of the rather disdainful term of “this of the South” (*pn rsy*) but at least of “King of Upper Egypt” (*nswt*).

heavens¹⁵⁸, which subsequently poured rain in abundance. On the other hand, a stela of Ahmose describes an unusual storm that fell on Egypt, speaking of thunder, torrential rain, overturned houses, deteriorated tombs and a long period of obscurity. Finally, Julius Africanus situated the Flood of Deucalion (Δευκαλίωνος κατακλυσμός) during the reign of Ahmose¹⁵⁹. These three references are maybe linked to an exceptional hurricane but perhaps to the eruption of Thera. The current tendency is rather to date the cataclysm before Ahmose's reign, but new investigations more precise and new archaeological discoveries would tend to bring it closer to the reign of this king¹⁶⁰.

Daniel Stanley, geo-archaeologist attached to the Smithsonian Institute, found pumice further west, around Lake Manzaleh. As Vandersleyen, he connects rather hastily the set of the plagues of Egypt to acid particles and ash dust ejected by the volcano in the troposphere and the stratosphere¹⁶¹. While it is true that some wounds or other phenomena described in *Exodus* could correspond to volcanic eruption sequelae, their succession clearly falls within wild imaginings. Moreover, it is implausible that these calamities have occurred one after the other: Egypt would have taken decades to recuperate, which would not have escaped to the archeology.

However, remains a serious aporia: according to the geo-archeology, the Thera eruption predates the reign of Ahmose. Yet, Manfred Bietak found in Avaris many pumice blocks (attributed with certainty to the volcano of Thera by the investigations they were subject at the University of Vienna) but in a chronostratigraphic layer posterior to the reign of Ahmose and not prior to it¹⁶². This author notes, however, the possibility that the pumice had floated in the Mediterranean Sea long before coming aground in various parts of the Delta and the northern coast of Egypt. Anyway, this major eruption is close enough to the reign of Ahmose for that the memory of some corollaries of the cataclysm remained vivid were introduced later in the stories of the exodus from Egypt as manifestations of the god

¹⁵⁸ The explosion of Krakatoa was heard as far as Australia, about 4,000 km away. Thera and the Nile Delta were separated by about 750 km, the explosion of Thera, much stronger, had to be heard in Egypt. It is to be noted that both the text of *Exodus* than the Rhind Papyrus speak of the "voice" of a god.

¹⁵⁹ Syncellus, Frag. 52, *kata Afrikanon*.

¹⁶⁰ See Moeller – Marouard – Ayers 2012: 87-121.

¹⁶¹ *Geological Society of Washington, 1146th meeting, 26 mars 1986*.

¹⁶² Bietak 1999: 44-45.

of Israel. But, considering the latest analysis and findings that tend more and more to bring together the Thera eruption and the reign of Ahmose, the opinion that the Rhind Papyrus and the Tempest Stela would only describe a devastating hurricane is becoming less credible.

Kim Ryholt interprets the Tempest Stela as a symbol of the atrocities and violations of royal tombs that the Hyksos could have committed¹⁶³. No conclusive document supports such assumption. Thus, the discovery of the pyramidion of Ay I at Avaris, while the pyramid of the king had to rise near Memphis, does not imply that the Hyksos have looted and demolished the monument to appropriate the deceased king's funerary treasure: the pyramid could well have been violated before and the pyramidion, which maybe lay on the ground, have been brought back to Avaris as a decorative object and not as a trophy. Some subsequent pharaohs are not deprived of denigrating the Hyksos but no text has been discovered treating them of graves violators, which, logically, would have been the case if they had committed such wrong acts. Moreover, it should be stressed that the Papyrus Rhind, Hyksos Document almost contemporary of the Stele, described also a “storm” that one cannot associate with some Hyksos' exactions.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE HYKSOS ACCORDING TO MANETHO AND HIS EPITOMISTS

*Under a king whose name was Misphragmuthosis, the shepherds were subdued by him; and were indeed driven out of other parts of Egypt, but were shut up in a place that contained ten thousand acres. This place was named Avaris. [...] The shepherds built a wall around all this place, which was a large and a strong wall; and this in order to keep all their possessions, and their prey within a place of strength*¹⁶⁴.

(*A. Apion*, I, 14, 86-87)

While he is supposed to quote Manetho *verbatim*, Josephus attributes the siege of Avaris to the sixth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, and not to the first as archeology has shown. The Hellenized name he gives to this king, Μισφραγμαουθωσις, belongs to the agglutination of *mn-hpr-rꜥ dhwtj-ms*, coronation name and birth name of Thutmose III. However, Josephus imputes to this king a reign of 25 years and 4 months, the exact

¹⁶³ Ryholt 1997, 146 sv.

¹⁶⁴ Bietak 1994: 77, fig. 16, gives a reconstitution of the “large and strong wall” of Avaris.

duration of Ahmose’s reign¹⁶⁵. Josephus was certainly a partial writer, a man clever to “return his coat”, but not a moron. We have seen that he probably worked on an unknown and late copy of Manetho’s *Aigyptiaka*. This one was perhaps already modified regarding this point but it is not sure. The oldest preserved Greek manuscript of *Against Apion* is contained in the *Codex Laurentianus* (11th century CE), on which all later manuscripts are based, but it is well known that this copy contains additions and modifications. In the Antiquity, given the poor quality of scriptural materials and writing sometimes fanciful of the authors or copyists, it does not take long for a copy to be altered. By example, the Ahmose and Thutmose confusion appears under another shape less than a century after Josephus’ death, in the third apologetic writing that Theophilus of Antioch dedicates around 180 CE to Autolycus:

Moses was the leader of the Jews, as I have already said, when they had been expelled from Egypt by King Pharaoh whose name was Thmosis. After the expulsion of the people, this king, it is said, reigned for twenty-five years and four months, according to Manaitos’ reckoning.

(Syncellus, Frag. 51: *Theophilus, Ad Autolycum*, III, 20)¹⁶⁶

In Theophilus, Misphragmuthosis has become Thmosis. But this king is still credited of the exact duration of Ahmose’s reign. But if we replace the *theta* of Θμῶσις by an *alpha*, we recover the name of Ahmose (Ἀμῶσις), that indicates that originally, Josephus has probably written Ἀμῶσις, as Manetho did. In Africanus, this name is transcribed *Amos* (Ἀμῶς)¹⁶⁷. The conversion of Misphragmuthosis into Thmosis can also be explained by the fact that an intermediary copyist of Josephus knew that Misphragmuthosis was also called *ḏḥwtj-ms* (a name which Thmosis is one of the numerous corruptions). A few lines later, Theophilus, as Josephus, places again this Misphragmuthosis (corrupted in Mephrammuthosis) to its correct position (the sixth) in the 18th Dynasty. Syncellus, who had finally perceived the confusion but does not detect

¹⁶⁵ Thutmose III reigned alone thirty-two years, but fifty-three years and eleven months, counting Hatshepsut’s “co-regency”.

¹⁶⁶ Waddell 1964: 106-109; see also 107, note 6.

¹⁶⁷ Frag. 52, *kata Afrikanon*; Waddell 1964: 110-111. (Africanus had collected this information to Apion, who had taken it in the writings of Ptolemy of Mendes, who might have had access to royal lists.)

its origin, unaware that the pharaohs bore five names, ends up by noting that *Ahmose* [is] *also called Misphragmuthosis*¹⁶⁸.

The confusion between the pharaohs Ahmose and Thutmose III could also belong to an Egyptian misinterpretation given to an unknown epitomist of Manetho about the first campaign that Thutmose III led in Canaan in his 22nd regnal year. The minutes of this campaign open with a preamble referring to the time when the Hyksos were masters of Egypt:

His Majesty [Thutmose III] spent the fortress of Tjaru during the first victorious campaign to submit those who attacked the borders of Egypt. [...] Indeed, for many years, they [the Hyksos] had governed this land which was plundered, each was working for their Greats who were in Avaris. Then, at the time of others [i.e. other kings], it happened that the garrison which was there [in Avaris] being at Sharuhén of Yursa, at the end of the land [of Egypt], they fell in rebellion against His Majesty.

Annals of Thutmose III, lines 6-13¹⁶⁹

Although Thutmose III states that the Hyksos were overwhelmed in the time of other kings before him, the mention of the rebellion against “His Majesty” (*hm=f*) could have been misinterpreted. At Thutmose’s time, the Canaanite fortress of Sharuhén, last Hyksos bastion, had fallen for over a century. In reality, the revolt quelled by Thutmose was the anti-Egyptian coalition fomented at Megiddo by the Syrian king of Qadesh, which justified the pharaoh’s campaign. A misunderstanding could have suggested a decisive action of Thutmose against the Hyksos¹⁷⁰. Thutmose engraved at Karnak, on the western side of the sixth pylon, a list of cities submitted on this occasion. Many of these names (inevitably Asians) seem to evoke personal Hyksos names: i.e. *ysp-hr* (in 78th place, but the signs are very damaged¹⁷¹) and *y^ckbim* (in 102nd place¹⁷²).

¹⁶⁸ Syncellus, id. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ French translation by Dessoudeix 2012: 189-190, translated into English by myself (the clarifications enclosed in square brackets are mine too.)

¹⁷⁰ Breasted 1931: 83; Redford 1970b: 43-44.

¹⁷¹ Mariette 1875: plate 20.

¹⁷² *Op. cit.*, plate 19

Eusebius, in *Preparation for the Gospel*, gives also Ahmose for the deliverer of Egypt and the pharaoh of the Exodus, but he acknowledges copying on this point, not Manetho, but Ptolemy of Mendes:

Then the Egyptians have accurate registers of dates. And Ptolemy, not the king but a priest of Mendes, the translator of their writings, in narrating the actions of their kings says that the journey of the Jews from Egypt to whatever places they chose, under the leadership of Moses, took place in the time of Amosis king of Egypt. [...] After him Apion the grammarian, a man of great reputation, in the fourth Book of his Egyptian History [...] says that Amosis demolished Avaris [...] as Ptolemy of Mendes recorded in his Chronology.

(*Prep.*, X, 11)

By cons, in the extract from his *Chronicle* included in the fragment 53 of Syncellus, Eusebius seems to contradict himself: after having given Ahmose as the founder of the 18th Dynasty and the conqueror of Avaris, he places the Hebrews' exodus at the end of the dynasty, during the reign of a king called Chencheres. Knowing that the spellings Χενχερής and Χερής are redundancies of Ἀχενχερής (given elsewhere for a daughter of Ωρος¹⁷³, who is wꜥnrꜥ, i.e. Akhenaten), it would concern Ankhkheperoura (which *Achencheres* is the Greek exonym), coronation name of Neferneferuaten, ephemeral woman pharaoh who reigned after her father Akhenaten for c. 2 years¹⁷⁴. Syncellus immediately notes in a short excursus that Eusebius is in contradiction with all the other authors¹⁷⁵. However, it is unlikely that this chronological anchorage of the exodus from Egypt at the end of the Amarna period, during the reign of a queen-pharaoh (that the mention mistook for a man) comes from the hand of Eusebius: it is more than likely that an anonymous commentator brought his own vision in the Greek text, before the Armenian copy was written.

Within a few years, the troops of Ahmose have taken over Memphis and its region. According to the back of the Rhind Papyrus, they would have released Tjaru and Heliopolis in the year 11 of the reign of the Hyksos king Khamudy. The Hyksos troops would have entrenched themselves in Avaris. The date of the evacuation of Avaris is not



¹⁷³ Syncellus, Frag. 50, 51.

¹⁷⁴ She is given for having reigned 12 years and 1 month, but it is likely a copy error for 2 years and 1 month, duration more in conformity with the historical reality.

¹⁷⁵ Frag. 53, *kata Eusebion*.

known but it is accepted that the Asiatic domination of Lower Egypt had ceased before Ahmose’s 22nd regnal year. This belief is based on an inscription dating from that year, in which it is mentioned that Palestine oxen were used at the reopening of the limestone quarries of Turah, south of Memphis¹⁷⁶.

The “year 11” of the inscription on the back of the Papyrus Rhind has also been attributed to the reign of Kamose¹⁷⁷. It is probably wrong: Kamose seems to have reigned only three (or four?) years, and not to have advanced as far as Tjaru.

The Tempest Stela, incomplete as broken into several pieces which have not all been recovered, contains no date. However, in the composition of Ahmose’s nomen, the sign of the Moon still has the spikes of the crescent pointing upward: . This detail could situate the monument before year 22, so at the times when Khamudy still held Avaris. The reversal of the sign () occurred between year 18 and year 22, according to Vandersleyen¹⁷⁸. This representation of the Moon with the spikes of the crescent pointing upward came from the Asian imagery; its replacement by it with the spikes pointing downward would mark the will to break with Asiatic uses¹⁷⁹. The spelling change may have occurred after the fall of Avaris, given the symbolic importance of this liberating event. If the storm described in the stela is the same as that mentioned on the back of the Rhind Papyrus, we could date the described events around year 20 or 21 of Ahmose, since in this year 11 of Khamudy, Egyptian troops had entered in Tjaru and that it is commonly accepted that the fall of Tjaru shortly preceded the evacuation of Avaris, which took place before year 22 of Ahmose. This storm cannot currently be linked to the Theran eruption because, even retaining its *terminus ante quem* (1600) and the *terminus post quem* of the beginning of the reign of Ahmose (1570 for Edward Wente), the difference between this disaster and the year 20 of the reign of Ahmose (which would then be 1550) is still some fifty years. It would be surprising that we should such ascend the reign of Ahmose.



Except if the SIP was shorter that it is currently believed.

¹⁷⁶ Breasted 1906: II, 12; Vandersleyen 1995: 219.

¹⁷⁷ Barbotin 2008: 80.

¹⁷⁸ Vandersleyen 1971: 213. See also Biston-Moulin 2015: 42-46.

¹⁷⁹ Dhorme 1945: 54-60.

The discovery of Khayan’s seals (15th Dyn.) at Edfu, within a secure context, together with Sobekhotep IV’s (13th Dyn.) could justify considering the question¹⁸⁰. Nadine Moeller, Gregory Marouard, and Natasha Ayers deduct that it is necessary to ascend the reign of Khayan at the beginning of the 15th Dynasty¹⁸¹. This contradicts Manetho, who, according to Josephus, mentions just after Αφωφίς a king he calls Ἰαννάς, unknown in the other copies but who is most likely the son of Khayan attested as *s3-nsw smsw ynss*, “the king’s eldest son Yanass”¹⁸². If Manetho is right (which is not sure), we should admit, in this case, that the Hyksos rulers did not succeed in a patrilineal way and that some kings have reigned between Khayan and Yanass, which is not impossible. In the present state of our knowledge, and although there is, except for a single copyist of Manetho, no royal attestation of Yanass, we can presume that he succeeded (ephemerally?) to his father Khayan. Many scholars believe that Yanass did not reign but, in this case, one wonders why the Egyptians would have retained his name, that Manetho could not find elsewhere than in a royal list. We cannot explain why Manetho, or Josephus, positions him after Apopi. According to Kim Ryholt, Apopi could have been a usurper who would have overthrown Yanass shortly after the death of Khayan. This author notes that Apopi’s sisters (Siuat and Tani) are never called “king’s daughter”, which implies that they, and necessarily their brother, were not of royal descent¹⁸³. All those contradictions mean, in the words of Vandersleyen, *que la chronologie du début du Nouvel Empire n’est pas encore stabilisée*¹⁸⁴ (and we can say the same about the end of the SIP, even of all the SIP). To be convinced, it suffices to see that the dates given by the Egyptologists for the beginning of Ahmose’s reign oscillate on forty years: between 1570 BCE for Edward Wente and 1530 BCE for Wolfgang Helck (we here follow Vandersleyen who gives 1543). Maybe there was in the SIP more parallel reigns than we think, even a momentary oligarchy, as well as the decree authored by Nubkeperra Intef in his 3rd regnal year leaves to expect. If there was a dynasty at Abydos or Thinis (see Senebkay, who is perhaps the king *wsr*   of Turin P. 11/16, and his likely successors (or predecessors) yet to be identified), it is possible that other “dynasties” have existed elsewhere than Thebes (Edfu,


¹⁸⁰ Moeller – Marouard – Ayers 2012, 87-121.

¹⁸¹ *Id. ibid.*

¹⁸² Bietak 1999, 36 and 75, fig. 13.

¹⁸³ Ryholt 1997: 256 ff.

¹⁸⁴ Vandersleyen 2016: 67.

El-Kab?). Their leaders, although they took a royal protocol, could have been those that Intef calls *shn-iry=f* (“powerful companion [holder of authority]”) in his decree and not pharaohs who would have succeeded each other. The king of Thebes – the *nswt* as Intef describes himself by completing his title by the sign  (A43) representing the king wearing only the white crown of Upper Egypt – would have been, as formerly the Bishop of Rome, the *primus inter pares* endowed with the right to interfere in the affairs of his pairs¹⁸⁵.

Ahmose died after a reign of 25 years and 4 months. A little over a century ago, the first forensic examinations of the mummy ascribed to the king (found in 1881 in the cache of Deir el-Bahari) estimated him some 50 years of age; we know now that he was less than 40 years old, which corresponds to the brevity of life of Ahmosid lineage. The identity of this mummy (CG 61057) is disputed because of slight anatomical dissimilarities with those of his family members and also by the fact that the body has not the arms crossed over the chest. It is no longer in the Cairo Museum with the other royal mummies but in the Luxor Museum, with the body presumed to be that of Ramses I. Such dispute does not consider that the mummy of Ahmose would be, after that of Tao (whose arms occupy the position they had during his agony), the second oldest royal mummy discovered almost intact nowadays¹⁸⁶. Therefore, it is unknown whether the use of crossing the arms of the deceased king as to make him hold the scepter and the flagellum already existed at Ahmose’s time or whichever is later. The radiography of the mummy of his son Amenhotep I (CG 61058), deteriorated (fraction in the lower left arm), obviously “patched up” and anyway never unwrapped, cannot provide any information. His arms are crossed on the chest but this posture can have been given to the king during the re-wrapping of the mummy in the 21st Dynasty period. The mummy of Thutmose I (CG 61065), Ahmose’s second successor, does not have either crossed arms (it is disputed too). The first clearly identified royal mummy in “Osirian attitude” is that of Thutmose II (CG 61066), posterior about 40 years (and 3 reigns) to Ahmose. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that Thutmose II was the first known king to adopt this posture. As for the confusion of the mummies by the priests of the 21st Dynasty, common sense leads us to

¹⁸⁵ Drioton – Vandier 1969, 295.

¹⁸⁶ Senebkay is older but it remains of his body only a disjointed skeleton.

admit with Luc Gabolde that they were certainly better informed than us of their identity¹⁸⁷.

The radiography of the presumed body of Ahmose reveals degenerative arthritis of the spine and an advanced osteoarthritis of the knees which have afflicted the deceased with a serious infirmity and reduced his mobility¹⁸⁸. This contradicts the posthumous biography of Ahmose son of Ebana describing Ahmose going and coming on his chariot during the siege of Avaris. But perhaps this description is imaginary and reflects rather the image of Amenhotep I, a king that Ahmose son of Ebana accompanied also to the war.

THE EXPULSION OF THE HYKSOS, A CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Contrary to what is still often said, all the Asians did not quit Egypt and were not expelled. Far from it. According to Manfred Bietak, *l'idée que la population gouvernée par les Hyksos a été expulsée du pays est une opinion encore répandue jusqu'à présent dans l'égyptologie. Il existe pourtant de solides indices que la plupart demeurèrent dans le Delta*¹⁸⁹. Once passed the first moments of exhilaration and the probable excesses which followed the abandonment of Avaris by Khamudy and his court, Ahmose quickly realized that he had no interest in killing or expelling the upper class who had efficiently managed the country and knew all the workings of the administration. These naturally joined their new master's service, as well as most little people from their siblings, as attested by the onomastics and the uninterrupted production of Asian type objects during the 18th Dynasty. The perpetuation of the cult of the Canaanite avatar of Seth worshiped in the temple of Avaris shows that the clergy of this god was not disturbed and remained in place. Similarly, Ahmose probably granted forgiveness to the Egyptians passed into the Hyksos' service and who went straight (thereby continuing the amnesty acts initiated by his mother Ahhotep). No mention to the high-ranking military commanders, were they Egyptians, Nubians or Asians, that he had the interest to conciliate.

Still according to Josephus:

¹⁸⁷ Gabolde 2005: 59-72.

¹⁸⁸ Leca, 1976: 148.

¹⁸⁹ Bietak 2007: 753.

Thummosis, the son of Mispfragmuthosis, made an attempt to take them by force, and by siege; with 480,000 men to lie round about them: but that upon his despair of taking the place by that siege, they came to a composition with them: that they should leave Egypt, and go, without any harm to be done to them, whithersoever they would: and that, after this composition was made, they went away with their whole families and effects, not fewer in number than two hundred and forty thousand; and took their journey from Egypt, through the wilderness, for Syria.

(A. Ap., I, 14, 88-89)

The son (and successor) of Mispfragmuthosis/Thutmose III was not called “Thummosis” but Amenophis (*Amenhotep*), second of the name. He has nothing to do here. As for the son and successor of Ahmose, he too was not called “Thummosis” but Amenophis again, this time, first of the name. The confusion is most likely due to Manetho himself. All copies show that Amenhotep I, second king of the 18th Dynasty, was placed by Manetho third on his list, but followed by the correct length of his reign (20 years and 7 months, according to Josephus). He is preceded by... his successor Thutmose I (called Chebron), followed also by the correct length of his reign (13 years). This inversion and the fact that a subsequent copyist probably knew that Chebron was also called “Thummosis” may have generated the misunderstanding.

The figure of 240,000 expelled shepherds is quite simply identical to that already given by Josephus when he spoke of the 240,000 ὁπλιτῶν (“hoplites, foot soldiers”) of the alleged invader of Egypt, the first Great Hyksos Salitis¹⁹⁰. That of 480,000 men enrolled by the liberating pharaoh is, coincidentally, just the double, indicating that neither Josephus nor probably Manetho, had any information about that. Africanus is silent on the “composition” mentioned by Josephus (and echoed by Eusebius, who, at this stage, copies, not Manetho, but Josephus¹⁹¹). However, this detail could be closer than we think of historical reality. *Après de nombreuses années de fouilles à Avaris, on n’a toujours trouvé aucune trace de destruction concernant le dernier niveau de la période Hyksos. [...] Il semble que l’occupation ait simplement cessé*¹⁹². The fortress of Avaris was dismantled and its materials reused *in situ* in the building of a fortified royal complex

¹⁹⁰ A. Ap., I, 14, 78.

¹⁹¹ Prep., X, 13.

¹⁹² Bietak 1994: 37.

*qu'on ne peut associer qu'à Ahmosis*¹⁹³. So Avaris would not have been taken after heavy fighting, as it was long believed, based on the largely dithyrambic biography of Ahmose son of Ebana, but evacuated by the Hyksos in unknown conditions. If it existed a composition, the royal propaganda had no interest in talking about it, except to tarnish somewhat the liberating pharaoh's glory. But it is also possible that this story only told by Josephus, is again linked to the victorious campaign of Thutmose III in Canaan. This had also ended in a compromise under which the Asian kings might go home in disgrace, riding donkeys, Egyptians having confiscated horses and chariots¹⁹⁴.

But that as they were in fear of the Assyrians, who had then the dominion over Asia, they built a city in that country which is now called Judea: and that large enough to contain this great number of men, and called it Jerusalem.

(*A. Ap.*, I, 14, 90)

The Assyrians are unconnected with it all. In Assyria, at the time when Ahmose reigned in Egypt, the Assyrian kings had not real potency. They were more pious than warlike and their more powerful neighbors would have restrained any desire of territorial expansion. Manetho probably believed in the past existence and the possible resurgence of the legendary Assyrian kingdom of Ninos and Semiramis¹⁹⁵. As for the foundation of Jerusalem, at the time a simple mountain village, it is earlier than two millennia to the facts stated. It is unlikely that the Hyksos have become the mysterious *yəbusîm* (Jebusites) that David would have driven from Jerusalem¹⁹⁶ around 1000. No Bible verse, or even

¹⁹³ Bietak *op. cit.*, 47-48.

¹⁹⁴ For an Asian king, the humiliation did not come to ride a donkey, noble animal at the time, but of not to be on his pageant chariot (which was often pulled by donkeys, even by oxen).

¹⁹⁵ Ninos is a legendary king given to the founder of the Assyrian empire. According to a set of Greek and Persian legends, he married Semiramis, the wife of one of his generals, after machinations that led him to suicide (see the parallel with David's actions to obtain Bathsheba). After Ninos had stretched the Assyrian empire to India (!), Semiramis had him assassinated to reign in his place with her son Ninyas, with whom she had an incestuous relationship (other version: she slept, not with her son, but... with her horse). The legend attributes also to Semiramis the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon. (In reality, these gardens were probably at Nineveh: the names of Ninyas and Ninos being the personification of the name of Nineveh: *Ninua* in Assyrian, *Ninos* in Greek). One often sees in Semiramis the Hellenization of the name of the Assyrian queen Samsuramat, great wife of Shamsi-Adad V, prematurely died leaving his son and successor (the future Adad-Nirari III) too young to rule, bringing the queen to ensure the regency for four years during which Assyria warred successfully against the Medes.

¹⁹⁶ 2 S 5:6-10.

any *Midrash*, would link the Jebusites to Egypt nor precise the origin of this population, otherwise unknown by archeology.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE HEBREWS ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL SOURCES

Now the children of Yisra'el journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children.

(Ex 12:37)

This figure of 600,000 men “on foot” (i.e. in age to bear weaponry) is unlikely. All the assembled armies of the antique world of the second millennium BCE could not align as many warriors. The biggest military clash of the New Kingdom, the battle of Qadesh, which took place under Ramses II, was composed of about 30,000 men on the Egyptian side, including foreign mercenaries, facing about 35,000 on the Hittite side. This figure of 600,000 fighters implies a cohort, including women, children and elderly, of 3,000,000 souls, number higher than the estimated population of Egypt at the time. With the small and large livestock mentioned in this verse, such a column would have taken weeks to get in motion and the first of its members would already arrive in Canaan while the latter would have been trampling in the Delta. Such numerical superiority would have made impossible the oppression and expulsion of the Hebrews, and we do not see why, in this case, they would have had to flee. Without even mentioning insurmountable stewardship problems, we cannot imagine such a multitude of sedentary people, ignoring the existential vagaries of nomadism, being able to cross with considerable flocks of sheep and cattle the 200 km of the northeast Sinai desert. The Biblical School of Jerusalem suggests that the figure of 600,000 men could represent a census of all the people at the time when the tradition was fixed in writing¹⁹⁷. If one wants to believe in a vague reality of the biblical exodus, one must admit that it concerned, at most, one or two hundred people, including women, children and elderly. However, the *Quran* evokes a tradition that had not taken into account this hyperbolic figure: he describes the Hebrews as *a small band*¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁷ BJ 1998: 120, c, referring to Nb 1:46-47: 603,550 persons.

¹⁹⁸ Quran 26:54.

A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, very heavy livestock.

(Ex 12:38)

Who could have been this *mixed multitude* [which] *also went up with them*? These persons are presented as different. The terms used to describe them are *‘ê-reḥ raḥ*, which literally mean “many [of] abundance” but can also mean “abundance of aliens” or “abundance of Arabs”. If this representation reflects something real, it could refer to the departure of an Asiatic group among which would have been included a *small band* of ancestors of the Israelites. We find a new allusion to this “abundance” in Nb 11: 4, in the turn *wəḥāsap̄sup̄ ‘ăšer bəqirbō*, “the crowd that was among them”. We have every reason to believe that the author of *Numbers* – a Judean scribe – does not describe those he takes for his ancestors objectively, i.e. embedded in a mass of people, but, on the contrary, accompanied by it.

THE PHILISTINES AND THE “SIPTAH HYPOTHESIS”

Following the first verses of the departure story, a priestly gloss is inserted that upsets the itinerary:

Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, Elohim did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for Elohim said, “The people might change their minds when they see war and return to Mitsrayim”. Hence Elohim led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Sea of Reeds

(Ex 13, 17-18a)

The Philistines (Hebr. *p̄ālešet*, plur. *p̄ālīštīm*) have emerged around the 12th century BCE. The reliefs and the texts of Ramses III at Medinet Habu call them *prst*. Four centuries later, they still exist: the Assyrian king Esarhaddon designates them by the term *Akhayus*, which seems to mean “Achaean” or “Greek”¹⁹⁹. The *1st Book of Samuel* corroborates this name in the story of King David’s relationships with his counterpart the Philistine king Akish (in which the name of the people would have been given to its

¹⁹⁹ Naveh 1998: 35-37.

monarch)²⁰⁰. The prophets Ezekiel and Zephaniah attribute to the Philistines a Cretan origin²⁰¹. They probably came from Achaia (north of Peloponnese) – via Crete, where they would have contributed to the overthrow the Minoan civilization²⁰² – before that the coalition of which they were part of came to clash with the troops of Ramses III, firstly in the area of Beth Shean, secondly at the entrance of the Nile delta. Defeated, their survivors were enrolled as mercenaries by the Egyptians and installed in garrison towns on the coastal strip of southwestern Canaan. There they would be maintained so well that after their assimilation by local Semites, their name was given to the entire region. In literature, they are located in five cities, grouped by modern writers as the “philistine pentapolis”: Gaza, Ashkelon and Ashdod, according to the *Onomasticon of Amenemope*, cities which must be added, according to various biblical books, Ekron and Gat²⁰³. It seems that from their territory, the Philistines controlled the deserts of the south, taking advantage of caravan and maritime trade. Without significant archaeological or textual discoveries, their language and culture are very poorly known. Though, the Ekron inscription shows that once settled, they used a Semitic dialect close to the Phoenician²⁰⁴, probably the vernacular.

Although this verse concerning the Philistines is a gloss and an anachronism, it incited (among other reasons) some researchers to locate the Exodus to the end of the 19th Dynasty, during the reign of Siptah (1195-1189 BCE). This king, son of Sethy II (or of Amenmes) and an unidentified consort, had a very brief reign. Given his young age at his enthronement, his sovereignty was almost entirely placed under the tutelage of the Queen Tausert, a spouse of Sethy II. According to the proponents of this hypothesis, Moses should be identified as the chancellor Bay, a great man of Asian origin who claimed to have fostered the enthronement of young Siptah. If appropriate, Siptah would not have shown an excessive gratitude to Bay since he later declared him “enemy of Egypt” and

²⁰⁰ 1 Sa 21:11-15.

²⁰¹ Ze 2: 5; Ez 25:16.

²⁰² Against: Vandersleyen 2016 (and generally all his writings). This author believes the Philistines originating from the Nile Delta, according to the sense he gives to *w3d wr*. On this matter (not discussed here) see: Claude Vandersleyen, *Ouadj our, un autre aspect de la vallée du Nil*, Safran (CEA 7), Brussels, 1999, and *Le delta et la vallée du Nil, le sens de ouadj our*, Safran (CEA 10), Brussels, 2008.

²⁰³ Gardiner 1947, I: 24: 190-191, 194, 199-200.

²⁰⁴ Naveh *op. cit.*

sentenced him to death. Ambiguous relationship between Bay and Tausert, then regent of the kingdom during Siptah’s childhood, would identify her with the “daughter of Pharaoh”, adoptive mother of Moses.

Siptah died while he had not yet reached the age of 20. He was frail and overwhelmed with a clubfoot, sequel of infantile polio. The lack of legitimate heir allowed then the ambitious Tausert to proclaim herself Pharaoh and rule alone c. 1189-1186 BCE, becoming the fourth (and last) female pharaoh²⁰⁵. At that time, Bay had definitely disappeared from official documents for at least one year. According to the hypothesis identifying Moses as Bay, this disappearance would have had no other cause than his departure in the wilderness at the head of the Hebrews.

This supposition was contradicted by Pierre Grandet, who published and commented an ostrakon seeming to indicate that the death sentence pronounced by Siptah against Bay was executed the year before the death of the young king²⁰⁶. Moreover, Tausert was not, as we know, pharaoh’s daughter. The *Exodus* does not evoke what, if any, should be remembered as the most salient memories of that period: the existence of a juvenile and infirm king reigning under the tutelage of a woman. It does not speak about a reign, yet extremely rare, of a female pharaoh who would have succeeded “the king who had not known Joseph”. And to finish, we do not find any connection with that period and the Hebrews in Manetho or ancient authors.

THE TWO ITINERARIES OF EXODUS

Four main roads have always connected Egypt to Asia.

1. The first ran from Memphis, passed by the area of present Suez and joined the end of the Gulf of Aqaba crossing the northern foothills of the Sinai. It received the latest Arabic name of *Darb el-Hajj*, “pilgrimage road” because it continued to Medina and Mecca by caravan roads.

²⁰⁵ Here we consider that Egypt properly “pharaonic” does not extend beyond the 30th Dynasty.

²⁰⁶ Grandet 2000: 339-345.

2. It was another, longer and less crowded, which rounded the present Sinai Mountain to the south, following the eastern shore of the Gulf of Suez, and ended along the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba to join the *Darb el-Hajj*.
3. Another one ran along the Wadi el-Tumilat and passing the northern Sinai, heading towards the Negeb.
4. The last one was leaving Tjaru, passed the Sirbonis lake and then ran along the Mediterranean coast; it entered Canaan by crossing the Nahr Mizraim, the “River of Egypt” (present Wadi el-Arish), and then joined Rafa and Gaza. It was the most common one, the shortest one and the best provided in water wells. It is this way that the priestly scribes named the “Philistines road” regardless of the anachronism of this appellation. The Egyptians called it *w3wt-hr*, the “roads of Horus”, since at least the 5th Dynasty²⁰⁷; it later became the first part of the Roman *Via Maris*.

After the gloss about the Philistines, the text comes back to the original narrative:

Then they set out from Sukkoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness [Priestly trad.]. Yahweh was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night [Yahwist trad.].

(Ex 13, 20-21.)

The northerner tradition of the expulsion does not cite any place name. The southerner traditions of escape (Yahwist and Priestly) indicate a departure to the north and the roads of Horus. The Christian exegesis has long sought these places to the south, towards the Red Sea, influenced by the *Vulgate* and unaware that Jerome of Stridon took up a confusion of the LXX that we discuss below.

Now Elohim [SQV: Yahweh] spoke to Mosheh, saying, “Tell the children of Yisra’el to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Ba’al-Tsephon, opposite it, by the sea.

(Ex 14:1-2)

Pi-Hakhiroth, often translated by “Mouth of Reedbeds”, was never identified. This name could come from the Hebrew *pēh* (“mouth”) and the feminine plural of a noun

²⁰⁷ Valbelle1989: 594.

containing the root of *ḥōr* (“openness”) with the article *ha* interposed. It would then decompose itself in *pî-ha-ḥîrōt* and would mean “mouth of the openings”. According to the text, this place would have been situated between Migdol and the sea. Migdol, “Fortress”, is a well-known site located to the northeast border of Egypt, a place where the roads of Horus join to enter the Northern Sinai desert, along the Mediterranean coast²⁰⁸.

It is here that the sea is mentioned for the first time. The scribe designates it twice with the term *yām*, without giving further details. To the Levantine peoples, the West-Semitic substantive *yām* not followed by a qualifier or a determinative points to the sea bathing their territory (i.e. the Mediterranean Sea), also known in Hebrew as *yām haggādōl*, “the great sea”. Late transcribers, relying perhaps on a parallel tradition, renamed it *yām sūp̄*. This appellation is often translated by “sea of reed” or “sea of rush”, while plants mentioned originally had to be papyrus if *sūp̄* (pronounced *soof*) is closely related to the Egyptian *twf* (pronounced *tjoof*), “papyrus”²⁰⁹. Anyway, these plants, whether papyrus or reeds, grow in fresh water, possessed only in the delta area. To the east, the lake Ballah and contiguous surroundings were named by the Egyptians *p3-twfy*, “the [region] of papyrus”²¹⁰.

In Biblical Hebrew, *yām* may designate any major expanse of water like a sea, but also a lake. Thus, the Tiberias Lake (or Sea of Galilee) in the north of Israel, was called *yām kinneret*, literally “lyre [-shaped] sea”. Therefore, *yām sūp̄*, could have been applied to the lake Ballah or a nearby one. Alas, the topography of the eastern lakes region was deeply upset, first by the advance of the Nile delta in the Mediterranean Sea since ancient times, and afterward, in the second half of our 19th century, by the digging of the Suez Canal. Moreover, scribes make use of Hebraic names to designate Egyptian toponyms of their time (from the 7th to the 4th century BCE), which makes difficult the identification of the same places at the beginning of the New Kingdom, a millennium before. The naming *yām sūp̄* seems to exclude the Egyptian Kemur (*km-wr*, “the great black”), i.e. the (salty) Bitter Lakes region near the Red Sea. The LXX’s error mentioned above stems from

²⁰⁸ Jr 44: 1; 46:14; Ez 29: 10; 30: 6.

²⁰⁹ Van Seters 2014: 129 and the bibliography in his note 42.

²¹⁰ The variety of papyrus that grew in Egypt in the Pharaonic era and could reach δέκαποδες (“ten feet”) according to Strabo, and which was probably the parent tree of *Cyperus papyrus* current species, no longer exists today, replaced by African and Asian species of the same plant.

the fact that its authors would have believed, not to an expulsion northward, *but to an escape southward*, this because the priestly tradition of the exodus-flight, wonderful and confused, would further hit their imagination. Therefore, they would have identified *yām sūp* as the sea of which two extensions form the gulfs of Suez and Aqaba, surrounding the current Sinai. In Greek, this sea was called Ἐρυθρὰ Θάλασσα. The *Vulgate* later endorsed this misunderstanding by literally translating *Erythra thalassa* by *mare Rubrum* (“Red sea”). However, it seems that if the first scribe (the one who refers to this place by *yām sūp*) had wanted to talk about the Red Sea, he would have called it *yām ’ēdōm* (’ēdōm = “red”, as ’ādōm). This hydronym, which also means “Sea of Edom” is not biblical, but it could have been that of the eastern arm of the Red Sea before becoming the name of the whole sea, knowing that one then gave to a region the name of the eponymous ancestor believed to have lived there. According to Strabo²¹¹, Quintus Curtius²¹² and Philostratus of Athena²¹³, the appellation *Erythra thalassa* did not come from the red color of its waters (which are moreover not red) but from a king called Erythras (Erithrus in Q. C.) who ruled the country. This legendary personage is none other than the late personification of the Biblical patriarch Edom/Esau who gave his own name to the neighboring region (later called Idumea from the same Hebraic root).

The single interesting place name of this itinerary is Baal-Zephon. It restores the theonym *Ba’al šəpōn* (the “Lord of the North” or the “Lord [of Mount] Zephon”), Syrian Wind god and protector of sailors. This deity is attested in Ugarit as *Bl špn*, in Israel as *Ba’al šəpōn* and in Egypt as *br dpn*²¹⁴. Under the Hyksos rule, Baal-Zephon was identified with the Egyptian god Seth, as evidenced by a hematite seal of Asian manufacturing unearthed in Avaris²¹⁵. The Year 400 Stela, later but coming from the Seth of Avaris’ temple, as well as another Egyptian stela of the 19th Dynasty found in the Ugaritic Baal-Zephon’s temple, show that this assimilation lasted²¹⁶. In the Hellenistic period, two sanctuaries were still attributed to this god, that became Zeus Kasios. The most important

²¹¹ *Geography*, XVI, 3, 7.

²¹² *History of Alexander the Great*, VIII, 9.

²¹³ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, III, 50.

²¹⁴ Lipinsky 1995: 244-245.

²¹⁵ Bietak 2007: 757.

²¹⁶ Bietak, *op. cit.*

one stood about 15 km east of Tjaru, near the western side of the Sirbonis Lake, on the current site of Mahemdiah. According to Herodotus, the shortest way to go from the *northern sea* (i.e. the Mediterranean Sea) *to the southern sea which is also called Erythraian, is from Mount Kasios*²¹⁷. The question of the existence of a temple of Seth/Baal-Zephon at this place during the SIP is still debated, but the hypothesis is not implausible, given that part of the Hyksos population consisted of sailors. Anyway, the scribe, who ignores the New Kingdom names, seeks to situate his narrative with the names of his time; we saw it with Avaris confused with Per-Ramses. To close the matter, there is no trace or epigraphical mention of Baal-Zephon toward the Red Sea. One just knows there the god Sopdu, guardian of the eastern borders, but this god has never been identified to Baal-Zephon, and he only shares the temple of the goddess Hathor.

It is noteworthy that only the Priestly document – the later one – mentions this sanctuary, without locating it otherwise that faced with the sea. Perhaps its author had information that we do not possess.

THE MIRACLE OF THE SEA

Since the release of the film *The Ten Commandments* in 1956, the brutal and solemn representation of the sea, first opening in two parts to let pass the cohort of the frightened fugitives led by the ruggedly handsome Moses/Charlton Heston, then closing in a thunderous noise on wicked Egyptians led by the pharaoh Ramses II/Yul Brynner, marked the spirits and supported many misconceptions. But what Cecil B. DeMille's historical consultants seemed to ignore is that this incredible episode intermixes three (even four) different versions of the same narrative more and more inflated along its rewrites and, especially, that in the older version: 1) the sea plays no part; 2) no victim is to be deplored; 3) Moses does not exist.

According to the Biblical School of Jerusalem, the story of the “passage of the Sea” (Ex 13:17-14:31) is complex: *the Elohist tradition has left few vestiges. In the rest, there is the trace of two traditions [Yahwist and Priestly] retained substantially, but some elements may have been added by narrators*²¹⁸. All three versions cover part of chapter

²¹⁷ *Inq.*, II, 158.

²¹⁸ BJ, 1998: 122, d (translated by myself). See also Gibert 1986: 173 ff..

13 and the whole chapter 14 of *Exodus*. Their text (disentangled on the basis of BJ 1998’s notes) is reproduced below in three written forms: the oldest story is in SMALL CAPITALS, the following in *italic type* and the latest in normal type.

Exodus 13

18b ... THE CHILDREN OF YISRA’EL WENT UP IN MILITARY FORMATION FROM THE LAND OF MITSRAYIM.

19 [...]

20 They set out from Sukkoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness.

21 *Yahweh was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.*

22 *He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*

Exodus 14

1 Now Yahweh spoke to Mosheh, saying,

2 “Tell the children of Yisra’el to turn back and camp before Pi-haḥiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Ba’al-Tsephon, opposite it, by the sea”.

3 “For Pharaoh will say of the children of Yisra’el, they are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in”.

4 “Thus I will strengthen Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them, and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Mitsrites will know that I am Yahweh”. And they did so.

5a WHEN THE KING OF MITSRAYIM WAS TOLD THAT THE PEOPLE HAD FLED, PHARAOH AND HIS SERVANTS HAD A CHANGE OF HEART TOWARD THE PEOPLE

5b *and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Yisra’el go from serving us?”*

6 SO HE MADE HIS CHARIOT READY AND TOOK HIS PEOPLE WITH HIM;

7a and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Mitsrayim with officers over all of them.

8a *Yahweh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Mitsrayim*

8b AND HE CHASED AFTER THE CHILDREN OF YISRA’EL

8c as the children of Yisra’el were going out boldly.

9 And the Mitsrites chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-haḥiroth, in front of Ba’al-Tsephon.

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the children of Yisra’el looked, and behold, the Mitsrites were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the children of Yisra’el cried out to Yahweh²¹⁹.

²¹⁹ They cried out to *Yahweh*, but in the following verse it is to *Moses* they speak.

11 *And they said to Mosheh, “Is it because there were no graves in Mitsrayim that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Mitsrayim”?*

12 *“Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Mitsrayim, saying: Leave us alone so that we may serve the Mitsrites? For it would have been better for us to serve the Mitsrites than to die in the wilderness”*

13 *But Mosheh said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of Yahweh which He will accomplish for you today; for the Mitsrites whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever”.*

14 *“Yahweh will fight for you while you keep silent”;*

15 *And Yahweh said to Mosheh, “Why are you crying out to Me²²⁰? Tell the children of Yisra’el to go forward”.*

16 *“As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the children of Yisra’el shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land”.*

17 *“As for Me, behold, I will strengthen the hearts of the Mitsrites so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen”.*

18 *“And the Mitsrites will know that I am Yahweh when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.”*

19a *THE MESSENGER OF ELOHIM, WHO HAD BEEN GOING BEFORE THE CAMP OF YISRA’EL, MOVED AND WENT BEHIND THEM;*

19b *and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.*

20 *So it came between the camp of Mitsrayim and the camp of Yisra’el; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.*

21a *And Mosheh stretched out his hand over the sea;*

21b *and Yahweh swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land,*

21c *so the waters were divided.*

22 *The children of Yisra’el went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

23 *And the Mitsrites took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea.*

24 *At the morning watch, Yahweh looked down on the army of the Mitsrites through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Mitsrites into confusion.*

25a *AND HE [MADE SOMETHING TO] [SQV: HE TOOK OFF] THEIR CHARIOT WHEELS, AND HE MADE THEM DRIVE WITH DIFFICULTY;*

[Lacuna: probably the epilog of the Elohist tradition]

²²⁰ It comes down to cries launched at Yahweh in 10.

25b *so the Mitsrites said, “Let us flee from Yisra’el, for Yahweh is fighting for them against the Mitsrites”.*

26 And Yahweh said to Mosheh, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters shall come back over the Mitsrites, over their chariots and their horsemen”.

27a So Mosheh stretched out his hand over the sea,

27b *and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Mitsrites were fleeing right into it; then Yahweh overthrew the Mitsrites in the midst of the sea.*

28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained.

29 But the children of Yisra’el walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

30 *Thus Yahweh saved Yisra’el that day from the hand of the Mitsrites, and Yisra’el saw the Mitsrites dead on the seashore.*

31 *When Yisra’el saw the great power which Yahweh had used against the Mitsrites, the people feared Yahweh, and they trusted in Yahweh and in His servant Mosheh.*

1. The FIRST VERSION was written before the insertion of Moses in the tradition. It stages, not Yahweh, but a messenger of Elohim. This protective entity is content with preventing Pharaoh and his chariots from joining the fugitives. But while the Egyptian chariot was always depicted by the Hebrew term *rekeb* (normally a two-wheeled chariot, pulled by one or two horses), the text mentions in 25a, the immobilization of “carts” (*merkāḇōt*, plural of the feminine substantive *merkāḇāh*, which refers to a four-wheeled cruder gear pulled by oxen or donkeys)²²¹. What the messenger of Elohim did to the wheels of the carts is not clear: the Hebrew form *sar*, hiphil (active) of the verb *sūr*, seems to transcribe another verb probably misunderstood by the copyist. *SQV* has translated it “take off”, which is correct but illogical because removing the wheels of a cart does not make its driving “difficult” but simply impossible. BJ 1998 translated as “stop”, which is no more concordant to the extent. The meaning of *sūr* is “separate, detach, dispossess, put away...” Anyway, this tradition never mentions the sea: the miracle occurs on dry land. It probably relates an immobilization of the Egyptian cartage bogged down in the sand. In addition to the absence of the sea (and of Moses), it should also be noted that 1) this is the only tradition to stage Pharaoh in person involved in the chase; 2) nobody perishes on this occasion.

²²¹ Which could indicate a rewrite from an even older tradition.

The last part of the story is difficult to interpret, and a textual lacuna has long been noticed following the v. 25a. This is probably the Elohist epilog, presumably erased due to dissimilarity with subsequent descriptions of submersion.

2. The *second version*, probably of Yahwist origin, tells of a flooding of the Egyptians by the waters of the sea. It names the Hebrews “Israel” and not “the children of Israel”. It does not stage a messenger of Elohim but Yahweh himself as a pillar of cloud or of fire. On the arrival of the Egyptians, the pillar of cloud lights up so brightly that it blinds the pursuers and prevents them, not only to approach the Hebrews but also to see that the sea is in the process of retiring under the action of an east wind generated by Yahweh. In the morning, the wind drops and the sea comes back with impetuosity. The Egyptian army tries to flee but Yahweh *overthrows it in the midst of the sea* (it is probably a rhetorical figure meaning that the sea flows over the Egyptians). Here Moses is present, but there is no longer mention of Pharaoh himself among the pursuers. It is noteworthy that in this version, the Hebrews *do not cross the sea* as they will do in the Priestly next narrative. As for the wind blowing from the east, it indicates that the text was probably written in Jerusalem: in Judea, the sea is to the west and only an east wind could repress it, while in Egypt, where the same sea is to the north of the country, the phenomenon could only occur under the action of a south wind, as later will describe the Greek travelers talking about Sirbonis Lake. Let us just retain that this miracle happens under a wind action, which could connect it with a legend on the powers of Baal-Zephon. Yahweh would later simply be coated with the attributes of this Syrian god.
3. The third version, the Priestly narrative, amplifies the event more and more. It divides the sea into two parts, creating a way permitting the Hebrews to cross on the dry ground of the seabed. Here, the waters open on a gesture of Moses, and not by a wind of Yahweh, then close shortly after, on another gesture of Moses, engulfing the Egyptian army chasing the fugitives. Again, Pharaoh is absent from the episode. The sentence: *I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen* is only a gloss repeated twice. It is an anticipated win formula on Pharaonic Egypt as a whole, that corroborates each time the contiguous gloss: *the Mitsrites will know that I am Yahweh*; it does not induce the king’s presence among the pursuers. Nowhere subsequently the king of Egypt will be mentioned as drowned.

Let us now see how the sea, initially absent from the tradition, could have been introduced in the two last versions. At about 15 km east of the ruins of Pelusium extends a brackish lagoon, the Sabkhat Bardawil. (Its name comes from King Baldwin I of Jerusalem, dead in the surroundings after the First Crusade.) In the Hellenistic period, this body of water was called Sirbonis Lake. This is a lagoon parallel to the Mediterranean Sea onto a length of about 90 km by 20 at its widest point. It is separated from the sea by a narrow sandbar which width varies from 300 to 900 m. This lake has long experienced a curious natural phenomenon related to the wind and seismic activity of the region. It resulted in sudden water withdrawals. As the lagoon was not very deep (about 3 m), one could pass almost dry up when the sea had retreated; but when the water came back, it was very sudden and the risk of drowning was real. The phenomenon is described by Strabo. But just before, the geographer speaks about another strange phenomenon which had occurred on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Ptolemais (present Acre), after a battle which had opposed Diodotus Tryphon and Sarpedon. It is interesting to briefly tell the episode because it is roughly identical to the *second version* of the passage of the sea.

In 144 BCE, Diodotus Tryphon (also called Tryphon of Apamea), general of the usurper Antiochus VI, was attacked around Ptolemais by Sarpedon, general of Demetrius II, the rightful heir to the throne of Syria. Unfortunately for him, Sarpedon was defeated. He retreated to the hinterland, while Tryphon and his troops were returning home following the Mediterranean shore. Suddenly, an immense wave arrived by surprise, which dragging some into the sea and drowning the others on the site. After the ebb, one could see their corpses lying pell-mell among dead fishes. Sarpedon, hearing the news, turned around to contemplate the cadavers of his enemies on the shore (as *Yisra'el* had seen *the Mitsrites dead on the seashore*).

Then Strabo adds:

Like occurrences take place in the neighborhood of the Mount Kasios situated near Egypt, where the land undergoes a single quick convulsion, and makes a sudden change to a higher or lower level, the result being that, whereas the elevated part repels the sea and the sunken part receives it, yet, the land makes a reverse change and the site resumes its old position again, a complete interchange of levels sometimes having taken place and sometimes not.

(*Geography*, XVI, 2, 26)

Diodorus Siculus also speak about this curious phenomenon:

Between Cæle-Syria and Egypt, there lies a lake, quite narrow, but marvelously deep and some two hundred stades in length, which is called Sirbonis and offers unexpected perils to those who approach it in ignorance of its nature. For since the body of the water is narrow, like a ribbon, and surrounded on all sides by great dunes, when there are constant south winds great quantities of sand are strewn over it. This sand hides the surface of the water and makes the outline of the lake continuous with the solid land and entirely indistinguishable from it. For this reason, many who were unacquainted with the peculiar nature of the place have disappeared together with whole armies, when they wandered from the beaten road. For as the sand is walked upon it gives way but gradually, deceiving with a kind of malevolent cunning those who advance upon it, until, suspecting some impending mishap, they begin to help one another only when it is no longer possible to turn back or escape. For anyone who has been sucked in by the mire cannot swim, since the slime prevents all movement of the body, nor is he able to wade out, since he has no solid footing; for by reason of the mixing of the sand with the water and the consequent change in the nature of both it comes about that the place cannot be crossed either on foot or by boat. Consequently, those who enter upon these regions are born towards the depths and have nothing to grasp to give them help, since the sand along the edge slips in with them.

(Library of History, I, 30)

It is not known which armies engulfed in the Sirbonis lake Diodorus had in mind here. Maybe he displaces in Egypt the legend of Tryphon²²² or a similar one. It is more likely that analogous tales were told long ago about the Sirbonis. If they were known by the Greek writers, they could also have been known by Jewish scribes living in Egypt, what could explain its presence in *Exodus*.

It is well known that many natural phenomena, taken as terrifying signs sent by the gods to show their anger, stimulated superstitious fear. Such was clearly the case of unusual movements of the Sirbonis waters. This explains why many antagonistic deities were associated with that place in a fighting or pursuit context: e.g. Baal-Zephon, the

²²² The authenticity of the event which Strabo talks about can be called into question because it is supposed not have left any survivors. However, Tryphon became king of Syria two years later by assassinating Antiochus VI and died after a four year reign in 138 BCE, dethroned and killed by Antiochus VII. The story likely relates an unknown tsunami. It is possible that it became a legend which staged the god Baal-Zephon.

Wind god, and his opponent Yam, the Sea god²²³; the Egyptians replaced them by Horus and his enemy Seth, whom the Greeks linked Zeus and the monstrous Typhon. The Judean scribes, meanwhile, preferred to summarize the phenomenon by attributing it to Yahweh in an ode (of which I only mention two significant excerpts below):

At the blast of Your nostrils, the waters were piled up, the flowing waters stood up like a heap; the deeps were thickened in the heart of the sea.

[...]

For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and Yahweh brought back the waters of the sea on them, but the children of Yisra'el walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.

(Ex 15:8 and 19)

Again, these are Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen which went into the sea, but not the king himself. This ode, called by modern writers *The Canticle of the Sea* (or *The Song of Deliverance*), voluntary uses of archaic language. The mentioned miracle is too similar to this of the Priestly version. Moreover, it contains mentions of chariots and horsemen, and we know that if the chariot appears to have been known in Egypt around 1550 BCE, the horse was commonly mounted only centuries later, in imitation of Assyrian military cavalry. As wrote André Caquot, it would be more appropriate to see in this song the historical adaptation of a pattern of Jerusalem religious lyric: Yahweh's victory on the waters of the chaos²²⁴. This “song”, in which one often see the celebration of the founding event that would have been the end of the painful ordeal of slavery in Egypt and the birth of ancient Israel as “nation”, is in reality a profession of faith written *a posteriori*. It tends to “historize” the old well attested theme of the fight against the “dragon” of the Chaos (as this of Marduk vs Tiamat, Baal vs Yam, Zeus vs Typhon, or Yahweh vs Tehom...)

Ultimately, it is said nowhere that the pharaoh perished in the waters. When, in the last two versions of the passage of the sea, the text tells that *Yisra'el saw the Mitsrites dead on the seashore* or that *not even one of them remained*, Pharaoh, absent from these versions, cannot be among the deaths. In the single version where the king in person embarks with his army in pursuit of the Hebrews, there is no miracle linked to the sea,

²²³ Clearly represented booth on the hematite seal of Asian style unearthed in Avaris by Manfred Bietak and mentioned above.

²²⁴ Caquot 1970: 376.

the deity having merely “slow down” the Egyptian cartage, without bringing to perish anyone.

In the *Quran*, the pharaoh is not flooded: he is thrown at first in the sea (17:103 and 51:40) before being saved *in extremis* so that he can testify of the power of Allah (10:90-92). A number of Muslim authors argue, however, and against any logic, that these verses mean the opposite: it would be only the cadaver of the pharaoh that would have been rejected by waters so that his dead body can serve as an example to the future generations. (Pleasant example when we know that the bodies of the Pharaohs linked to *Exodus* by the current historians were hidden from the eyes of future generations during more than 3,000 years.)

It was thus vain to try to know, as some do, if Ahmose, Ramses II, Merenptah, Sethy II or Siptah had been flooded. (For the anecdote: these kings died in their bed, maybe unhealthy but not drowned.)

It is probable that the eviction of *a part* of the Hyksos consisted of an accompaniment to the border, under the supervision of a military detachment, as in the end of Abraham’s story in Egypt:

Pharaoh commanded his men²²⁵ concerning him [Abraham]; and they escorted him away²²⁶, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

(Gn 12:20)

The Egyptian cartage escorting the deportees would have turned back in a rather logical way at height of the Sirbonis Lake, at the beginning of the desert of Sinai, ensuring that they took the Horus Road to Gaza. The oral transmission exaggerations and the transcribers’ imagination would have made the rest, and the successive rewritings would have transformed the shameful eviction in a so sensational and unbelievable triumph of the god of Israel.

²²⁵ *’ānāšīm*, “great men”, which has here the sense of “armed people, soldiers”.

²²⁶ *šallāhū ’ōtōw*, “to send outside all of them”, from *šālah*,

FROM THE SANDS OF THE WILDERNESS TO THE MISTS OF THE MEMORY

After the episode called “the passage of the sea”, the tradition of the exodus-flight overrides that of the exodus-expulsion and breaks the course of the initial narrative to offer an alternative one unable to resist to a critical examination. It skews the fugitives, either south or towards the oasis of Qadesh Barnea (current Tell el-Qudeirat) situated on the edge of the desert of Sin and the Negev. The biblical texts contradict themselves regarding the duration of the stay that the Hebrew would have made there: 38 years according to Dt 2:14; 40 days according to Nb 13:25. This long journey will be interrupted several times by the interpolation of alternative traditions, around which will be added the fabulous episodes of the theophany of the Sinai, the given of the Tables of the Law, the Golden Calf, the manna, the quails, the miraculous sources, and so on. This set and most of the following stories, up to and including those of the conquest of Canaan, are only mythological or legendary developments, even pure inventions. Some focus on anchoring the figure of Moses in a narrative which initially ignored his existence. Others seek to fill gaps of the tradition by endless wanderings stuffed with more or less justificatory anecdotes followed by an impossible conquest of Canaan in the blood of the *ḥêrem*²²⁷, ruining cities already ruined centuries ago or collapsing with the sound of trumpets the ramparts of a city which did not possess more ramparts than Joshua possessed trumpeters. They are of no interest to our subject.

Around 1100 BCE, foreign elements, which surely owned traditions linked to their personal wanderings, came to be added to the primitive populations of Israel and Judah constituted by Canaanite emigrants of the lowlands. It is maybe this “package” of routes, often contradictory, that the drafters of the exodus-flight wanted to combine in a single course, without caring about anachronisms and other contradictions revealed by the chaining of the stages.

The late amalgam of these disparate traditions induces that the received text could gather several sacred mountains summarized under the naming of Sinai, Horeb, Paran or Seir. And heaven knows – so to speak – if they are numerous in the region to have been the object of a worship to a mountain deity of the Storm. These traditions would have been inserted progressively by writers to give to the founding event of the Hebraic

²²⁷ From *ḥāram*, “to devote”. This involved exterminating the inhabitants and destroying or appropriating their possessions.

community the historic and topographic context which was absent. The whole under the leadership of a legendary leader who's charismatic personality served as link uniting in a single narrative the most disparate episodes. The Bible reveals us moreover that afterward, the alleged descendants of Moses would have been denied and deprived of the priesthood for the benefit of the equally alleged descendants of Aaron. The gratitude has its limits.

However, it remains difficult to explain that in the 6th century BCE (while northern traditions arrived in Judah nearly 200 years ago), the prophet Jeremiah, who lives in Jerusalem, seems to know nothing about Moses and the *Exodus*. Even in the vehement speech he delivered against those who fled to Egypt after the assassination of governor Gedaliah, he does not make the slightest allusion to it; nor in his last oracles, yet written in Egypt, where he had finally taken refuge too.

CONCLUSIONS

The single historical evidence of a massive arrival of Asiatic peoples in Egypt followed later by their departure (voluntary or forced) concerns the Hyksos. This souvenir, sedimented over several centuries of memory and at first evoked by the kingdom of Israel, could have been, throughout its rewrites, transformed by the kingdom of Judah in a propaganda narrative exalting the power of Yahweh.

As suggested above, one might consider that around the 16th century BCE, a clan of “pre-Israelites” expelled from its wandering land by famine and/or rival clans, has received from a Hyksos pharaoh, or a Hyksos ruler, the authorization to settle down in the region extending from the eastern Delta to the edge of the desert of Sinai. This clan could have been one of these groups of Lesser Hyksos forgotten by history. Some hundred years later, within the framework of the inevitable reactionary excesses of the early days following the reconquest of the Delta by Ahmose, some of these poor people, breeders, farmers, workers, craftsmen, have, by fear, chosen to leave Egypt on the request (probably formulated in unkind terms) of the plebs or the soldiery. Others, not knowing where to go, would have preferred to stay in this country where, after all, they were born and their fathers before them, and where they were acculturated. It is they who would have been despised for a time because of their ethnicity. The first ones, the voluntary exiles, would

have spread in Canaan the version of their expulsion, whereas a more subjective interpretation would have been retained by the second ones.

The expelled would have left towards the northeast from the Delta, escorted by a military detachment which would have abandoned them at the level of the Sirbonis Lake. Once crossed this place, the subsequent stages, located outside Egyptian territory, had to take only a so minimal importance that they fell into oblivion. After passing Gaza, these people would quickly incorporate the mass of the Canaanites but would have retained in memory their passage in Egypt. However, they could not already be Israelites: Israel was formed in Canaan, and not before the excluded reached it. Later, their descendants would have introduced this souvenir into the Northern tradition. Then, in the days before the invasion of the kingdom of Samaria by the Assyrians in 725 BCE, the priests and the scribes who took refuge in Jerusalem taking with them the sacred rolls of their “history”, would have transmitted this memory in the Southern tradition, where it remained, not without having been the object of many embellishments.

The fact that the Bible preserved nothing about the five hundred years which followed the eviction of these “pre-Israelites” (half-millennium in the course of which the Syria-Palestinian corridor became the battlefield of the pharaohs of the New Kingdom) has nothing abnormal regarding the successive destructions that the powers of the time inflicted to the cities-states of the Near East. The *Book of Judges*, supposed to tell us the prolegomena of Israel and Judah national history, evokes only old etiological legends of Canaan related to mythological heroes or local kinglets²²⁸. And there is a very good reason to that: one cannot tell the history of people which does not yet exist. Except by inventing it. That was made later by the Deuteronomist editors of *Joshua* and *Samuel*.

In reality, the memory of Israel and Judah wakes up only around 1150 BCE, after the unsuccessful second invasion of the Sea Peoples. After that Ramses III installed the defeated Philistines as mercenaries in garrison towns of the Southern Levantine coast and after that the Philistines cleared the Egyptian tutelage during the reign of Ramses V (1146/1143 BCE)²²⁹.

²²⁸ Finkelstein 2013: 49.

²²⁹ Amato (D') – Salimbeti 2015: 59.

The hypotheses of a peaceful penetration in Egypt of ancestors of the Hebrews at the time of Hyksos, of a stay of about one century in the eastern Delta, and of a departure under Ahmose within the context of the eviction of a part of the backbench of the Asians, offer important concordances between logic, current knowledge and tradition. They were formulated from the Antiquity, while the assumption of the exodus at the end of the Amarnian period or under one of the following pharaohs is not found in any credible ancient author. As thinks Claude Vandersleyen: while we look desperately for chronological supports for the Exodus, it is surprising that Manetho’s information, the single which is really precise, is systematically ignored²³⁰.

A final element advocating for the exodus under Ahmose is that in the three and a half centuries which cover the period from the beginning of the reign of Thutmose I (1506 BCE) to the end of that of Ramses IV (1146 BCE), it is almost impossible that a consequent group of “prisoners” was able to run away via the Sinai, even by the North or by the South. If appropriate, the finicky Egyptian administration would have mentioned it. And even though this mention would not have been found, fugitives together with women, children, seniors, and cattle, would never have been able to cross the deserts bordering eastern Egypt without being intercepted. During this 350-years period, the Egyptian control of Sinai and Canaan was total. There were Egyptians everywhere. As has often been pointed out, a flight in Canaan during this period would have been to flee Egypt to seek refuge... in Egypt. Ahmose, by cons, after a brief raid in Canaan intended to liquidate the last Hyksos bastion, never came back in this area.

The conjectures emitted in this study remain, of course, hypotheses which could be ruined in the future. Maybe a decisive element on the exodus of the Hebrews – one way or the other – will be one day unearthed somewhere. Chances are tiny but it is not absurd to hope it. The sites of Thebes, Memphis, Avaris, not to mention those of Canaan, have certainly not revealed all their secrets.

But we are maybe looking for what isn’t...

²³⁰ Vandersleyen 1995: 234, 236.

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